

SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY

AUTUMN 1983

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**John Howkins proposes
an agenda for the Films Minister**

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Gary Mead on Polish Cinema after Martial Law

Brian Winston on Direct Cinema

Richard Roud on Henri Langlois

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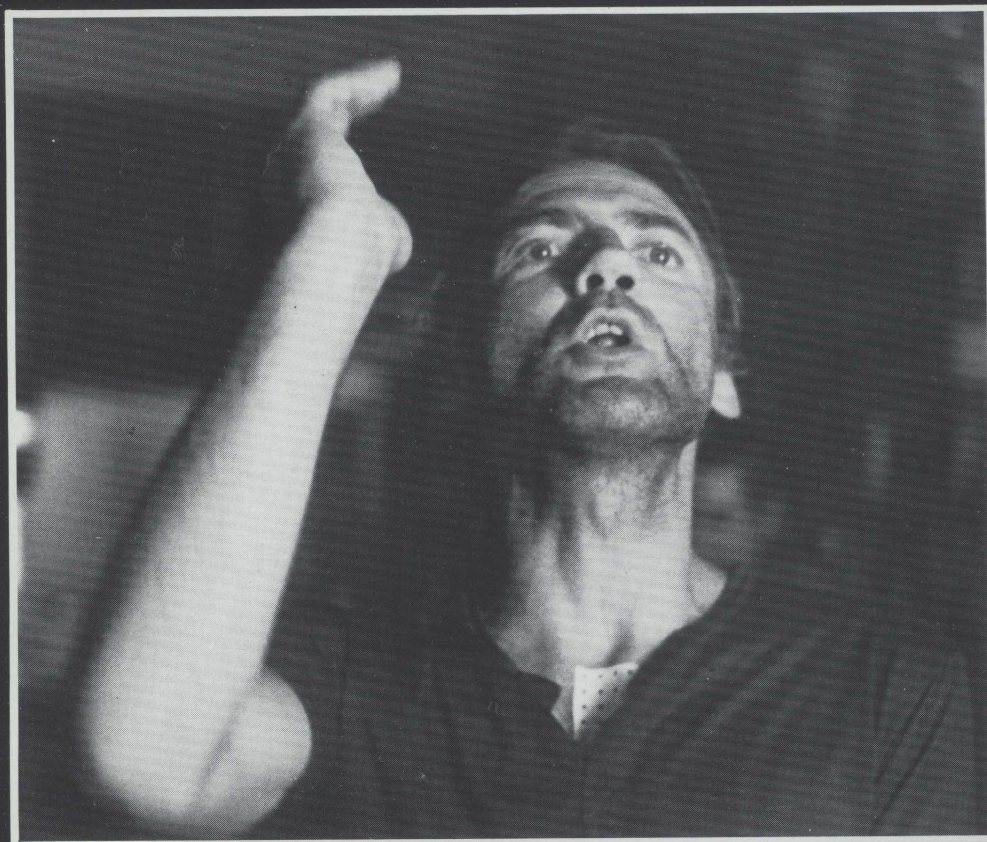
Yilmaz
Güney's

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with
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Ayse Emel Mesci

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to another prison—REVOLT."
Yilmaz Güney

Cannes Film Festival 1983



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CITY**

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Alain Tanner

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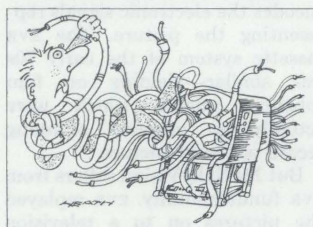
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Cheaper video

Video's answer to the B movie?

When video first became a consumer reality (longer ago than most people realise—in fact, 1973), there was much controversy about its potential. At that time, few dreamed that every other TV home in Britain would own a video recorder by the mid-1980s (one now widely accepted forecast).

The dramatic growth was stimulated by the recording capability of the medium; the facility of 'time-shifting' television programmes. Now, however, there is a shifting trend towards the pre-recorded programme, encouraged by the absurdly low overnight rental fees for which some movies are offered by the local take-away. But there is a tiny problem for the pre-recorded movie market: financial ruin. At the prices many video shops are renting films (even below £1 per night), the software industry could collapse. Add to that cut-throat policy the probability that over 60 per cent of pre-recorded video cassettes are pirated copies and it is not difficult to realise that video is not recycling much money back into the film industry. At least, not yet.

While the distributors are energetically trying to bring some sanity into the business, with realistic pricing policies and well-funded anti-piracy measures, others are trying to use technology to lower even further the purchase price of pre-recorded programmes. One well-publicised answer is the video disc, currently selling movies on the Philips LaserVision system at between £18 to £23 in the UK; to be joined in the autumn by the huge range from RCA, whose SelectaVision system becomes available in Britain with movies at prices ranging from £10 to £13. Meanwhile, a British inventor has come up with another idea which he claims will solve the cost and piracy problems in one fell swoop. It all sounds rather too good to be true, and of course there are snags.

Mr Gordon McNally comes from Tyneside, but in many respects seems like a remarkable Scotsman—John Logie Baird. Both share the distinction of inventing extraordinary things (Baird's specially treated undersock, McNally's puncture-proof tyre). Perhaps McNally will also share with Baird the less enviable distinction of inventing an ingenious moving picture system which is just not good enough—technically—to survive.

McNallyVision, as it is called, uses cassetted monochrome film

without sprocket holes. The images on the film can be derived by low-cost photocopying technology (e.g. diazo), and the base of the film is much thinner than usual—allowing one small cassette to hold a considerable length compared to, for example, conventional 8mm film. Thereafter the photographic film analogies end. The images on the film appear to be normal (albeit in monochrome), but in fact they are a TV-type scanning pattern which encodes the electronic signals representing the picture. The EVR cassette system of the early 70s was similar—yielding on film coherent images which were actually an encoded scanning record of the TV picture.

But McNallyVision differs from EVR fundamentally. EVR replayed the pictures on to a television screen by scanning the film image with an electron beam—which was appropriately modulated to yield the necessary television signals. McNallyVision scans the film with a laser beam—viz. visible light. In consequence, the modulated laser beam may be projected direct on to a screen as an optical image. Alternatively, if preferred, the modulated beam may be converted into electrical signals and fed into a conventional television set through the aerial socket.

In London last July, Mr McNally demonstrated prototypes of both kinds, claiming that these would be launched in the Spring of 1984 and actually daring to put a price on them. A front projection unit comes with a small, free-standing screen for only £150. A portable desk-top back projection version will be offered for £160. And a completely electronic model which connects to a TV receiver will be £175. These remarkably low prices are supported by a claim that the pre-recorded cassettes will be equally inexpensive, ranging from

only £2 for a short pop music item to £12 for a feature film.

The anti-piracy protection is an added feature. Each cassette incorporates in its plastic moulding 5 per cent of an essential microchip which makes the system work; the other 95 per cent of the microchip is built into the playback unit with which the cassette makes electrical contact when inserted. Thus pirated copies of the McNallyVision cassettes would also have to reproduce the 5 per cent fragment of the microchip—a technical impossibility.

But Mr McNally has a huge task ahead if he is to compete with corporate giants such as Philips, RCA and JVC. The latter company have recently introduced a refinement in video recording which looks like further shifting the trend away from off-air broadcast recording. This is the VHS-C, an extremely small and lightweight video recorder and camera which is compatible with domestic VHS machines. But instead of using the larger VHS cassette, it employs a miniaturised version about the size of a thick cigarette packet. To replay the cassette in a VHS machine, it is loaded into a special plastic adaptor (looking like a standard VHS cassette).

Home movie-making on video, compatible with over 60 per cent of the current 4.5m VCRs in Britain (the remainder are Beta or V2000), is thus now possible without a great deal of bulky paraphernalia. What is equally important is that the quality of the results is extremely good. The lightweight camera (1.25 kg) incorporates many refinements, such as an electronic viewfinder and macro focusing, making it suitable for fairly sophisticated productions. The recorder (weight 2.4 kg) is equally versatile, can double as a playback machine (with viewing of rushes on the electronic viewfinder of the camera if required) and provides clean 'cuts' from one shot to the next. At £1,150 for both camera and recorder it sounds expensive but is of course competitive with many 16mm cameras when equipped with sound recorders. And the running cost of tape, against film, is negligible.

Whatever happens in the battle to bring down the cost of pre-recorded video programmes, there is little doubt that the next new wave of excitement in video will be caused by this new generation of lightweight, low-cost video cameras and recorders. As a dyed-in-the-wool producer of documentary films (on both 16mm and 35mm), I have to confess that a weekend spent with the VHS-C was an impressive experience.

This development (and others now imminent) exemplifies how the technical and cost barriers

to movie-making are going to be rapidly eroded. The only missing element, which money and technology cannot provide, will be talent.

JOHN CHITTOCK

Since this story was written, a dispute has erupted in the audio-visual press as to the precise technical methods used by McNallyVision. The above description was taken from information given at the London press launch, but important details—especially relating to the use of monochrome film—now may owe more to intention than achievement.—J.C.

Moscow

'Pavlova' plummets, Yevtushenko soars...

Returning to the Moscow Film Festival after several years, one discovered that little had changed. The huge Hotel Rossiya, with its stuffy foyer packed with posters, placards and multilingual announcements, still absorbed its guests in that labyrinth of circular corridors; the festival cinema next door was invariably packed with a public eager to see almost anything that moved. Even the movies seemed to be blood-brothers of those seen four or six years ago. A film dealing with anti-imperialist struggles or the beginnings of nationalist fervour in a Third World country can always be assured of a place here, irrespective of how crude or schematic the treatment may be. My oft-repeated question as to what constituted a progressive film never received a proper answer. To be well-meaning and left-wing was enough, it seemed. The sad aspect of this situation is that I suspect the lay festival audience may well believe that they are seeing the pick of world cinema (instead of some of its dregs), while many of the greatest creative figures in film history seemingly remain virtually unknown.

Like other festivals, Moscow had its share of comical mix-ups over national entries. With *Local Hero* turned down allegedly because of its Russian sailor who does some shady deals on the side (an absence deplored by the interpreters who do such a good job in finding tickets for elusive screenings), EMI filled the gap with the British-financed but American-produced *Frances*. This produced the lovely irony of the actress award going to that great 'British' star Jessica Lange. Another British entry, *Biddy*, was announced for the Children's Section and had to be rescheduled after pressure from its producer, Richard Goodwin. The festival's 'hottest' tickets were undoubtedly for Coppola's *The Outsiders* and the inevitable *Gandhi*, whose rapturous



British inventor Gordon McNally with video.



'The comically overblown Anna Pavlova.'

Les Plouffe

A Canadian family saga surfaces for the third time

On gloomy days it seems as though Canada is the land of government committees. Committees established to investigate everything from tv and film production to distribution and exhibition, each committee reiterating its dedication to 'Canadian content', and each committee running up against the inevitable problem of 'sleeping beside an elephant', as the Prime Minister once blithely described our proximity to the United States.

It was a government committee that brought us the tax shelters of the 1970s, just as it was a government committee which eliminated the shelters. When the dust had hardly begun to settle on the resulting chaos and a rather dreary record of films, yet another committee was formed to legislate the new panacea, Pay TV. Most recently an entire commission devoted itself to investigating the state of the arts in Canada. Its findings were seen by some to be so strident in their nationalism that, without any hesitation, another committee was formed to 'study' the commission's findings.

In the meantime the Pay TV dream begins to look more and more like a fantasy. Two of the licensees have run into severe problems. C-Channel, which had valiantly tried to bring culture to the medium, has gone into receivership before reaching its first birthday, while T-Vec is busy trying to clean up its softcore image in the hopes of attracting new customers. A third national licensee, First Choice, has raised the ire of many by signing a \$300 million production deal with

Playboy Productions, not exactly what the government-appointed members of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission had in mind when they offered First Choice its broadcasting licence.

Within such an atmosphere it's quite remarkable that anything actually gets produced. If only a small part of the production reflects something vaguely Canadian, one is almost tempted to celebrate it beyond a reasonable level. And to think that there is actually a sequel to a Canadian film being shot seems like something of a miracle.

From 1954 to 1960 television viewers of both the English-language CBC and the French-language Radio Canada took part in what was then a television first, by watching the weekly soap opera, *La Famille Plouffe* or *The Plouffe Family*. Based on a remarkably successful novel by Roger Lemelin, this was the story of a working-class family from 'la basse-ville' of Quebec City. It was folksy, sentimental and sometimes even terminally kitschy (or 'ketaine' as it is known in Québecois), but somehow it managed to remain strikingly human. A television first, it was also a television last: nothing like it was tried again. Before the series ended, a generation of Canadians had grown up with these characters and the family Plouffe had secured its niche in Canadian popular culture.

In 1979, the *Plouffe Family* was rediscovered by producer Denis Héroux, who, along with Los Angeles-based John Kemeny, had just formed a new company, International Cinema Corporation. ICC was lining up its first three productions and *Les Plouffe*, as it was now known, took its place alongside *Atlantic City* and *Quest for Fire*. The idea was to produce a six-hour mini-series for television, as well as a feature

reception culminated in the entire audience surging under the ceremonial box to greet Richard Attenborough. With its narrative drive and superb colour, it must have indeed looked a masterpiece to an audience reeling from the previous days' stodge.

Moscow's main value for a Western visitor, of course, is its vast panorama of new Soviet productions, and this year we found a continuation of those probing, private themes so noticeable in the NFT's recent Soviet Week. Still under something of an official cloud, Klimov's *Farewell to Matyura* (shown in a distant public cinema) develops the theme of people being moved from their homes in favour of a new construction site with a pantheistic fervour attributable, no doubt, to Klimov's wife Larissa Shepitko, who was killed near the beginning of shooting. The film is full of superb, misty images of forests and lakes enclosed in sweeping crane and tracking movements; it clearly comes out on the side of those evicted.

Two new works by actor/director Nikita Mikhalkov displayed his range and limitations. *Kinfolk*, a raucous satire about a possessive, all-knowing grandmother who visits her family, seemed ill-judged and uncertain; infinitely superior was *Without Witness*, an austere, theatrical two-hander played by the great Irina Kupchenko and Mikhail Ulyanov. These and other films continue to flesh out our perceptions of Russian daily life and the way people are looking at present dilemmas.

No contemporary relevance was discernible in the comically overblown *Anna Pavlova* by Emil Lotyanu, which, together with

Bondarchuk's John Reed films, constitutes the most expensive recent Soviet attempt to woo Western audiences. Virtually a series of vignettes following Pavlova's career around the world, the film boasts a singularly uneasy leading performance, a poorly used polyglot cast, including James Fox and Martin Scorsese, and vulgar musical arrangements (particularly of 'The Swan'). Michael Powell's connection with the production remains mysterious, but it was rumoured that his task now was to recut and dub the film for Western distribution.

During a hectic festival, it is always a pleasure to escape for an evening into something completely different, and my Moscow treat was tickets for Yevtushenko's 50th birthday party—a poetry reading in the Olympic Stadium followed by a reception for all his friends who happened to be in Moscow. Although only half the stadium was used, it was a tremendous experience to sit among 10,000 or so people as Yevtushenko declaimed, acted and cavorted, like a great opera singer who never actually sang. From a mixture of familiar and new poems, it was significant that a particularly dramatic one about the evils of toadyism received the greatest applause. Certainly nothing like it could occur in the West: here was a popular figure actively communicating with an audience fully alive to the shadings, codings and whispered truths of his words. Afterwards, Yevtushenko spoke of his 'new career' as film writer and director on a project called *Kindergarten*, about his childhood years in Siberia, which we should see next year.

JOHN GILLET



The Plouffe Family: Gilles Carle's film.

IN THE PICTURE

film, and the production became a media event in itself. Not only was there tremendous excitement over the rebirth of a bit of Canadiana, but ICC was making it the most expensive film ever made in Quebec with a \$6 million budget. Roger Lemelin co-authored the script with the director, Gilles Carle.

The film opened to slightly mixed reviews. Most critics liked it well enough, but more seemed to like the fact that it had been made. It was thought to be important. Various running times were tried with the final version coming in around three hours. Sprawling and not always well focused, the passage of time could be felt but the family seemed to become dwarfed by the proportions of the project. Thanks in part to Gilles Carle's following in France, the film was invited to the 1981 Cannes festival as part of the Directors' Fortnight.

As a TV mini-series, *Les Plouffe* fared slightly better, and may still prove to be a success outside Canada. As of now, there is no evidence of either the series or the film having been real 'hits', but International Cinema Corporation is in the middle of shooting another six-part mini-series and a feature film, both with the working title *Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe*, or *Ovide Plouffe's Crime*. Héroux explains, 'It's not a sequel in the sense that it's the result of an overwhelming box-office success. *Les Plouffe* was not a success in England or the United States. As a film it remains unknown, while as a TV series it is only beginning to be screened in Italy and France. The film needs the support large TV audiences can bring to it. By doing the second film and series, we have the chance to build on something begun by the first one.'

Ovide Plouffe's Crime, like its predecessor, is a Canadian-French co-production. Actually its co-production credits run almost as long as the cast's. 'The financing follows the same pattern as for the first one,' says Héroux. 'In all three of our new productions, you'll find HBO in the United States; Antenne 2 in France; CTV, CBC and Radio Canada; SuperChannel; ParaFrance; United Theatres; and Orion who is the sales agent.' Also included are government funding agencies, the National Film Board of Canada, and a large aluminium concern who will buy the advertising time when the mini-series makes it to commercial TV. Before the film is even released, it has already made back its money.

The structure, however, will be different. 'Gilles Carle is doing the first four hours of the mini-series, which will only be seen on TV. Then Denys Arcand is doing the final two hours, which will be released first as a feature film and

then go to TV. We think it's a good structure because it avoids the problem of the first film: a six-hour series does not easily shrink itself to a feature film, even one that runs three hours.'

Whereas *Les Plouffe* showed us the provincial ways of the family as the external reality of World War II approached, *Ovide Plouffe's Crime* is intent on showing the family's reactions to a more internal dilemma, one that begins ten years after the end of the first film. Denis Héroux once thought of the Plouffes as a saga that could potentially produce five or even more films and bring the family up to the present. Today he's changed his mind. 'I don't want to live with these characters any more and, besides, the whole thing could easily become a formula.' After this new mini-series and feature film, the Plouffe family will be retired once again. Given its longevity, however, no one is predicting they will remain that way for ever.

KEVIN TIERNEY

Cabiria

And now Pizzetti's 'Fire Symphony'

After presenting *New Babylon* and *Napoleon* (in the Coppola version) at the mammoth open-air Rome summer festivals in recent years, the Italians are now looking at their own silent spectacles with full orchestral accompaniment. The first had to be *Cabiria*, the Pastrone-D'Annunzio trend-setter of its

time (filmed in 1913) for which Ildebrando Pizzetti is credited with having composed an original score. In reality, all he did was to compose a symphonic piece, entitled 'Fire Symphony', which was to be played with the film's most famous sequence, the sacrifice of the young maidens to the fire god Moloch.

The most surprising fact that came to light from the screening this summer at the Florence Maggio Musicale Festival is that the 'Fire Symphony' had never been played since the film's premiere in Turin in April 1914 (and a reported but not documented repeat performance in Rome the same year). The music subsequently disappeared and the composer did not include it in his collected works even if in 1950 he did mention the painful experience while speaking at a 'Music and Film' conference in Florence.

On that occasion Pizzetti admitted that he had not seen the film before composing the music and had never had any desire to see it afterwards. In 1931 he would not allow Pastrone to record the music for an eventual soundtrack. The reasons seem to be that Pizzetti never really cared much about the chore and only accepted it because he had been talked into it by D'Annunzio, then at the height of his fame as a poet and national figure. Pizzetti believed, as most people were to believe for many years, that D'Annunzio was the 'author' of the film. In reality, the Italian poet, badly in need of cash, had lent his name to Pastrone's script. He was of course to write the

flowery and overlong titles which most critics agreed then as now were the film's greatest weakness, ruining whatever effects Pastrone's rudimentary but often inspired editing had created.

Pushed by D'Annunzio, Pizzetti went to Turin to see Pastrone, the *Ingegnere* (Engineer), who he thought was only the producer. The composer, who was 34 at the time, came back to Rome with an advantageous contract in his pocket (he was to be paid 10,000 lire, then about £1,300) but immediately got cold feet and tried to back out. Pastrone was very diplomatic and wrote saying he was not asking for 'cinematic music' but quite simply 'good music worthy of your name, of D'Annunzio and of the work of art in question.' Pizzetti relented but said he would only write the music for the Moloch sequence. The piece was for a large orchestra, baritone solo and choir. In this way, Pizzetti hoped that it would only get played in large cinemas. For the New York release—where it was to run a year—Carl Breil, who had arranged the music for the American release of *Queen Elizabeth* with Sarah Bernhardt, was engaged to do the accompaniment.

The rest of the music for the three-hour film was originally arranged by a pupil of Pizzetti, Manlio Mazza, and it is this score which the American conductor Peter Randall has unearthed for the Florence screening, for which the orchestra and chorus of the Maggio Musicale performed in the pit of the Teatro Verdi. The baritone Ettore Nova did his best to synch with the High Priest, who is singing almost in close-up, but as Nova had his back to the screen he was late on his cue for the singer's next appearance, so the rest of the 'Fire Symphony' went out of synch. To make matters worse, something went wrong with the projection and at the emotional climax, when Maciste is supposed to be saving the young Cabiria from the flames, we heard the music but were looking at a blank screen.

This was not then the best occasion on which to judge whether Pastrone's film really deserves its reputation as a trend-setter that was to influence Griffith, who is supposed to have had his own print which he studied while preparing *Intolerance*. Certainly Griffith and later DeMille must have been grateful to the Italians for showing how perspectives could be used in set design.

Pastrone went even further than Guazzoni in removing some of the static theatricality which had been too evident in most of the spectaculars up to that time. But it is also perhaps a mistake to exaggerate his contribution to the invention of film techniques.



Cabiria: the Pastrone-D'Annunzio trend-setter.

He patented the 'Dolly' but his use of it in *Cabiria* is not creative in the way it was to be in Griffith, where tracking shots in and out of the frame were used to surprise the audience with what the frame reveals rather than with just the novelty of a moving camera. Re-seeing the film in a Florentine context, one is more inclined to admire Pastrone as a Brunelleschi, an architect, than as the Cimabue to Griffith's Giotto.

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Loseyiana

The Losey Collection, a donation to the BFI

It is said to have taken four taxis to transport the collection of scripts, documents and correspondence which Joseph Losey this summer donated to the British Film Institute. Surveying the crammed rows of filing cabinets in which the material awaited classification, one felt half surprised that it had not required a pantechonicon.

Here are annotations to a career in assorted performing media spanning half a century, from a 1932 Losey translation of Obey's *Noé* to the programme for the 1982 New York Festival screening of *La Truite*. Press cuttings recall Losey's prewar theatre career. 'With a fair representation of gendarmierie in the house, the Living Newspaper went to press at the Biltmore,' begins an account of the 1936 opening of *Triple A Plowed Under*, an event described by Heywood Brown as 'the most tumultuous premiere I have attended since two Irish factions fought over the production of Synge's *Playboy*.' Wartime radio scripts from the *Day of Reckoning* series bring back the high-flown propaganda campaign waged by NBC in tandem with the Council for Democracy. Dramatis personae for 'The People vs Quisling' (1943) include 'Woman—Voice of Norway', while those for the same year's 'The People vs Pierre Laval', written by Elmer Rice, run to both Joan of Arc and the Recording Angel.

One discovers that the working title of *The Dividing Line* was *Outrage*, that of *The Prowler* the less marquee-prone *The Cost of Living*. Correspondence randomly reveals the director's three 'least favourite' films to be *The Sleeping Tiger*, *The Intimate Stranger* and *The Gipsy and the Gentleman*. It underscores, too, the peripatetic nature of the movie business. 'Dear Joe, You sure get around ...' begins one letter, but one gains the impression that everyone involved in the exchanges is liable to be off next day to some far-flung corner of the globe.

It is salutary as well as intrigu-



Joseph Losey at his London home. Photograph: Chester Dent.

ing to confront the assembled minutiae of a film-maker's life. Detailed memos on editing jostle with a folder of material about *The Go-Between* encompassing everything from the National Trust brochure for Hicklingham Hall (the central location) to the seating plan for the supper held after that film's 'royal Norfolk premiere' in Norwich. And since some commentators have affected to see Hardyesque properties in *The Go-Between*, it seems revealing to discover that two years earlier Losey had preliminary exchanges with Robert Shaw (who was to co-produce it with him) about a screen version of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

As for unfilmed material, one of the most interesting random finds in the collection proves to be a 1950 screenplay by Herman J. Mankiewicz, *Woman of the Rock* (alluded to by Pauline Kael in her *Raising Kane* essay). The script deals with a posthumous investigation into the life of an Aimée Semple Macpherson-style evangelist, opens in the offices of a newspaper called the *Enquirer*, and later includes a superimposed banner headline: 'Sister Ruth Admits Love Nest'. No wonder a heavily scrawled inscription by Losey early in the manuscript declares: 'Run *Citizen Kane*.' To read this screenplay amid the almost Xanadu-like stacks of documents of the Losey Collection provides a momentarily eerie experience. It is reassuring to be reminded that in this case the progenitor is still very much active, and indeed was at the time of the donation on the point of embarking for Dallas to begin preparation of *Track 29*. Scripted by Dennis Potter, this will be Losey's first American-made movie since the intervention of the blacklist more than thirty years ago.

TIM PULLEINE

Taormina

British laurels

The Taormina festival, which has in recent years singled out *Radio On* and *Remembrance* for awards, continued its 'discovery' of the New British Cinema by giving this year's Grand Prix to Mike Radford's *Another Time, Another Place*. Among other notable films in competition was Aaron Lipstadt's splendid *Android*, reviewed in the Summer 1983 *SIGHT AND SOUND*, and *Angelo, My Love*, Robert Duvall's directorial debut, which was well received and took the UNICEF prize, appropriately enough since it centres on a nine-year-old American gypsy boy. The Tunisian-Belgian *Les Traversées*, directed by Mahmoud ben Mahmoud, is the grim and basic story of a Turk and an Arab trapped on a Channel ferry and denied entry to both Britain and France. As pressure builds, one escapes the predicament by killing a policeman and being taken into custody, while the other loses himself in an illusory world. Weakening in the second half, the film nevertheless has much to say about statelessness and exile—not to mention the horrors of cross-Channel travel. It was, apparently, based on a true incident.

Adamloos, by Mady Saks, recalled last year's *A Question of Silence*, and was a promising debut by another Dutch woman film-maker. This film is not as radically innovative as Marlene Gorris', but operates within similar territory. A young woman marries and gives up her job; she has a baby and gradually loses her sense of identity. She attempts suicide. After psychiatric treatment, she begins to rebuild a different relationship with her husband. Simply told

and conventionally made, the film's strength is the central performance of Monique van de Ven. *Piratene*, directed by Morten Kolstad, addresses the topical subject of unemployment in northern Norway. With no job prospects and time on their hands, a group of youngsters start a pirate radio station. What begins more or less as a joke grows into a threat to the establishment. A final protracted police chase in motorboats ends with two of the principals killed: an out-of-place, presumably commercial ending tacked on to an otherwise quiet and well-observed film.

Taormina's own organisation changed this year. A new board was formed, responsible for film, theatre and music throughout the summer months. The festival's money now comes from four sources: the towns of Taormina and Messina, the province of Messina and the region of Sicily. This is partly in recognition of the need for political backing, and partly an attempt to stabilise the festival. Now, with a guaranteed budget and a year-round administration, Taormina has achieved the solid base and certain continuity it needs to consolidate.

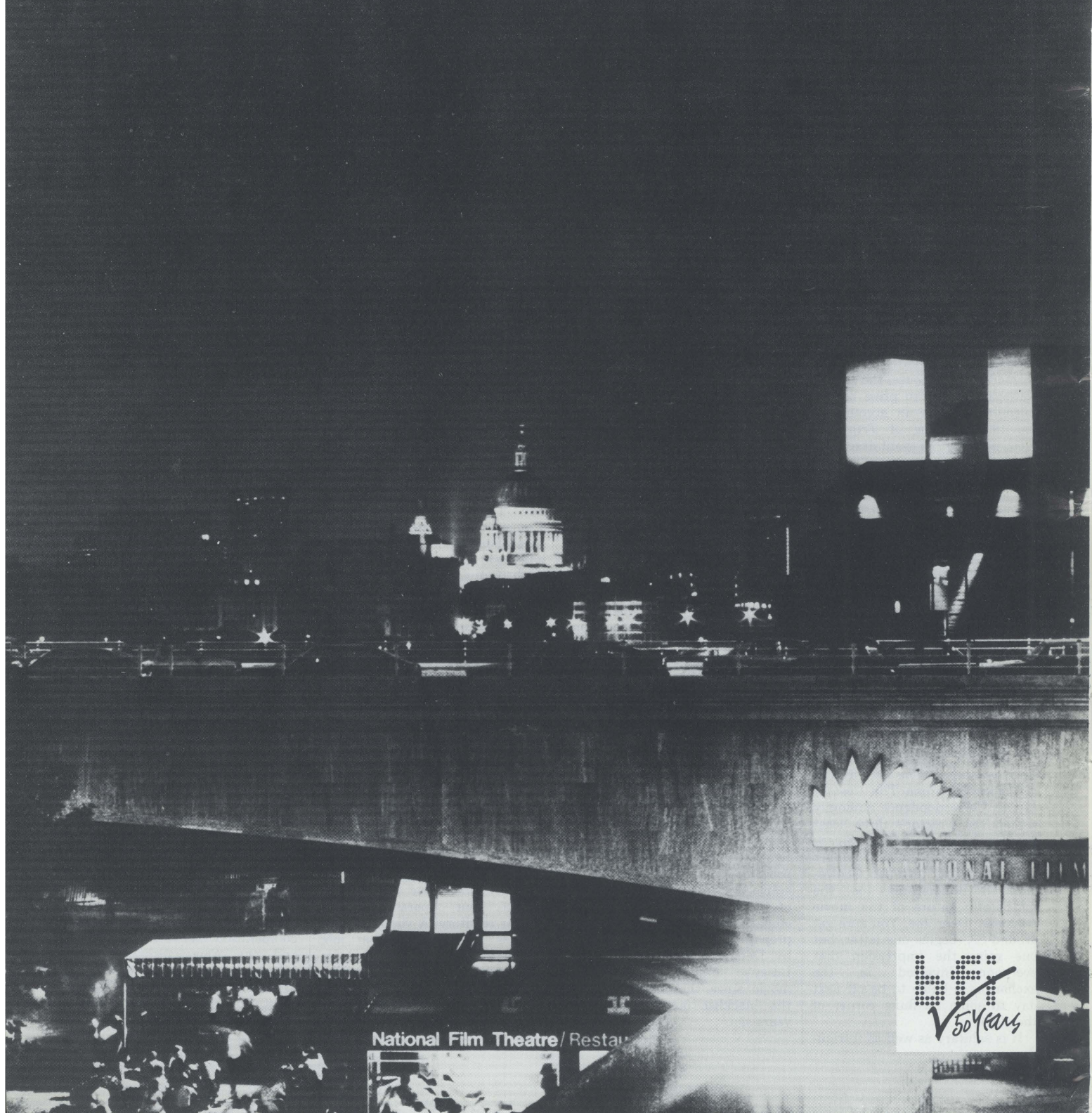
There was also evidence of other changes. In the first American Film Week, for example, pictures as diverse as *48 HRS* and *Man, Woman and Child* were on offer. This was bait for the public screenings at the huge Teatro Antico which, incidentally, has begun charging admission—still very small, but the principle of free public screenings was important and one was sorry to see it abandoned. There will be greater co-operation between Taormina and the American majors in future, but not one hopes at the expense of the festival's commitment to new, innovative and Third World cinema.

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Mr Baker: a challenge

An agenda for the
Films Minister by **John Howkins**



Films minister Mr Kenneth Baker MP.

The future of the British film industry is in the eye of the beholder. Last year, a few days after the opening of *Gandhi*, James Lee and David Puttnam, finding themselves nearby, couldn't resist going to see how long the queues were. James Lee had a direct interest as chairman of the Goldcrest production company; and Goldcrest were also backing David Puttnam's Enigma company. That night, the future looked good. The 1,700 seat Odeon, flagship of the Rank chain, was full and people were being turned away.

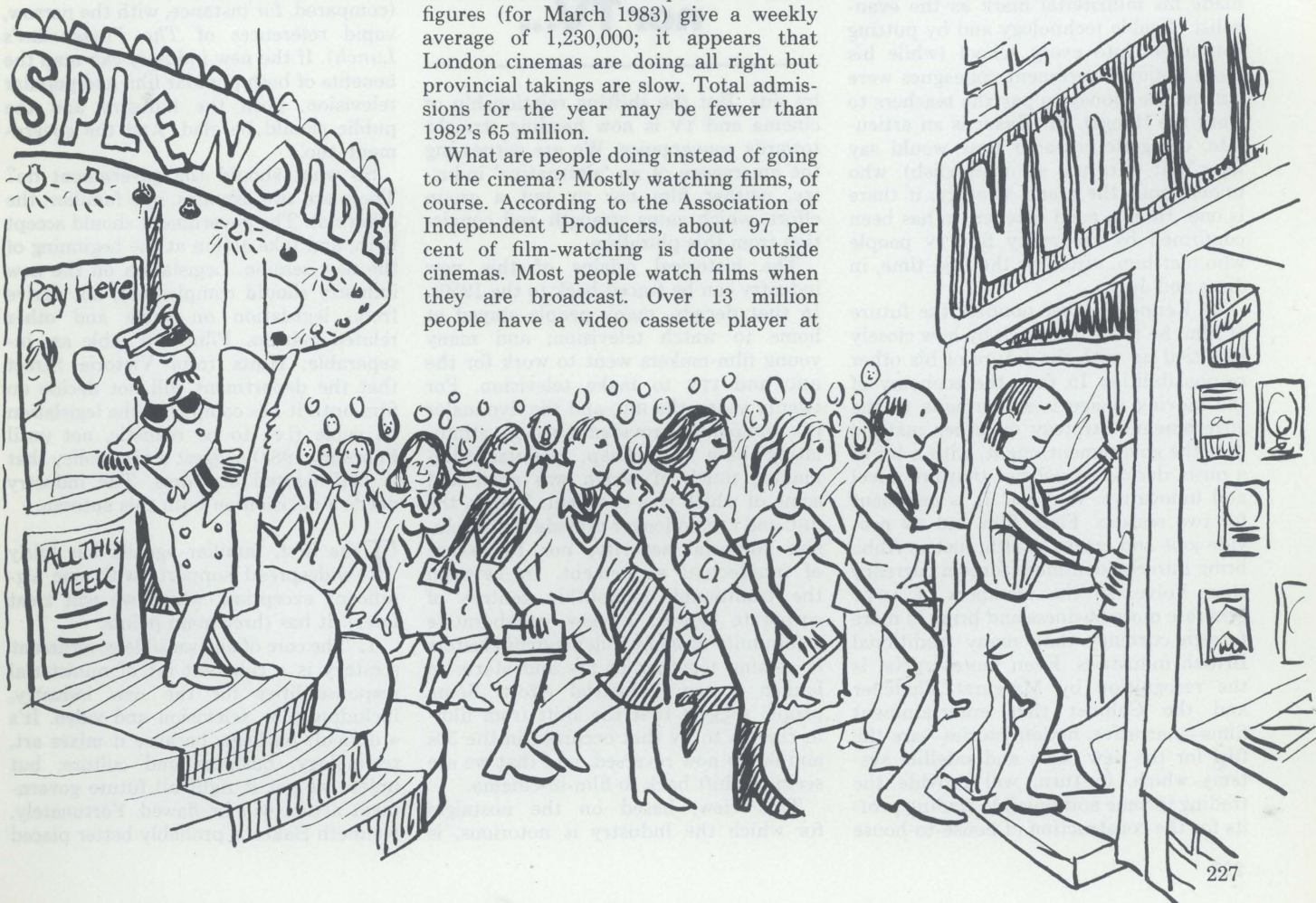
Ironically, this elegant, dynamic duo, while enjoying the fruits of their remarkable successes, are exceptionally aware of the other side of the box-office coin. Across the industry the facts speak of a different scene from the one celebrated in Leicester Square; although whether the implications are good or bad depends on where you're sitting. In the first three months of 1983 British cinemas sold an average of 1,430,000 tickets a week, which

is an improvement on last year's disastrous 1,349,000 tickets, but not as much as the exhibitors had hoped. The latest figures (for March 1983) give a weekly average of 1,230,000; it appears that London cinemas are doing all right but provincial takings are slow. Total admissions for the year may be fewer than 1982's 65 million.

What are people doing instead of going to the cinema? Mostly watching films, of course. According to the Association of Independent Producers, about 97 per cent of film-watching is done outside cinemas. Most people watch films when they are broadcast. Over 13 million people have a video cassette player at

home, and together they rent about 4 million cassettes a week, mostly movies, as well as watching films recorded off-air from the BBC, ITV and Channel 4. So the league table of film-watching is headed by broadcast movies followed by cassette movies, with cinema movies at the bottom. Price and convenience are powerful persuaders. Against a minimum of £3.30 and a maximum of £4.30 for *Gandhi* and *Octopussy*, it costs about 4p to watch a film on television. You can't compare the quality; but you can compare the price. And the producer can compare how much he or she gets from each outlet.

With astonishing speed the new technologies of electronic distribution have cut the link between film production and cinematic exhibition. And as these new systems have become more dominant, so government intervention has become more insistent. The culture and business of the moving image is now an important subject for public policy. It is necessary



to be fairly blunt about this, otherwise the bits and pieces that make up the film industry—production companies, distributors, cinemas, television, video—appear to be independent tribes, often warring with each other, and capable of being treated according to Westminster tactics instead of Whitehall strategy.

The Tory praxis is to let matters lie, unless principles of the free market are being infringed, or a regulation is clearly not working. For these reasons, Iain Sproat, MP, then a minister of state in the Department of Trade, with a special interest in replacing public support by private ownership, started to look at the film industry at about the same time that James Lee and David Puttnam were smiling beneficently at the Leicester Square crowds. He spoke of a major review, to be finished before 'the leaves were on the trees', and possibly including the demolition of the main principles of British film policy, which are the collection of a levy on cinema admissions and its redistribution to British films and young film-makers. Iain Sproat's review took longer than he expected; and on 9 June he lost his seat.

Memoranda outlive politicians, however, and the review is now being continued by the new films minister, Kenneth Baker, the Minister of State for Information Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry. The decision of Cecil Parkinson to give Kenneth Baker, an 'industry' minister, the job of looking after film policy was an interesting one. Whether or not it is a good decision is too soon to tell. Kenneth Baker continues to be, above all, the minister of information technology; he made his ministerial mark as the evangelist of cable technology and by putting computers into every school (while his more senior government colleagues were cutting the money to pay the teachers to work the things). Mr Baker is an articulate, energetic crusader (one would say fixer if it were not so un-English), who understands the grand strategy, if there is one. He is a good listener, as has been confirmed by the many film/TV people who met him, often for the first time, in June and July.

As Kenneth Baker ponders the future of film, he must be struck by how closely it is tied up with the future of his other responsibilities. In fact, the economy of the moving image is so germane to the government's strategy on other matters that the government might, with a bit of a push, decide on policies that are novel and innovative. Why so? It is pertinent for two reasons. First, film and TV provide jobs and create wealth; just as Abba bring into Sweden more foreign currency than Volvo, so the members of ACTT generate more business and bring in more foreign currency than many traditional British industries. Even more crucial is the recognition by Margaret Thatcher and the Cabinet that entertainment films—narrative, fiction, stories—are the fuel for the new cable and satellite systems which, in turn, will provide the trading income and possible trading profits for the construction of house-to-house

multi-channel cable networks. Question is, will film be a loss leader? Or will this government seize the opportunity to do more than the minimum and, instead, build on Britain's established strengths in film-making which are—with a marvellous sense of timing—starting their own resurgence.

Mr Baker faces a conundrum. The traditional concern of government with film and cinema has been restricted to the industrial and economic elements. The main instruments of policy have been quota (now effectively reduced to zero) and the levy. No government has concerned itself with the culture and aesthetic of film. With broadcasting, especially television, government attitudes have been more interventionist. Public bodies have been established explicitly and given legal responsibility to be editor and publisher of the broadcasters' output. In film, censorship is carried out by industry self-regulation. In TV, two public authorities, appointed by government, can veto what appears on the screen. In the past, these disparate forms of regulation existed happily side

We are witnessing the emergence of an alternative industry, neither film nor TV...

by side. But the shifting relationship of cinema and TV is now heading straight towards convergence. We are witnessing the emergence of an 'alternative' industry, neither film nor TV but a group effort, which gains strength and conviction from this pluralism.

The historical origins of this new industry can be traced back to the 1950s. In that decade, many people stayed at home to watch television; and many young film-makers went to work for the BBC and ITV to make television. For twenty years, the BBC and the five major ITV companies provided a secure, stimulating base for cheap, popular film-making much of which was good and some of which was excellent. Today, the BBC and ITV no longer provide that exclusive financial security, nor the sense of intellectual excitement. In between the traditional, monolithic centres of corporate power, a new collaborative community of many independent clusters is coming together in fits and starts to launch a new industrial effort. Some people suggest that the shift from film-in-cinema to TV that occurred in the 50s and 60s is now reversed, and that we are seeing a shift back to film-in-cinema.

This view, based on the nostalgia for which the industry is notorious, is

probably wrong. Any attempt to recreate a new British film industry like the old British film industry is probably doomed to failure—and will get short shrift from a Tory government. What actually is happening is something more ambitious, and much more interesting. Film-makers are leaving, or never joining, the major organisations and centres of power. The centres are imploding; the independents are becoming the majority. They are inventing a new industry which will overtake the old industry. Along the way they may play David to Goliath, but this is not their main purpose and might be a wasteful diversion.

The success of this new industry will depend upon its ability to produce the kind of popular fiction (and faction) that the BBC and ITV have produced in the past—but on the larger canvas and dealing with the kind of ideas that only film can support. With the best of television there is no compromise or modesty about popular success; or about producing fiction that speaks to a large audience, and touches the popular mood. Historically, film exploited these possibilities; then television exploited them; now a new combined industry has the chance.

I am not talking of the kind of soft popularity that surrounds the weekly TV serials and adventure stories. The aim is not popularity as an end but as a means to something else. There are many examples: Granada's *The Little Farm*; *Schlacken the Painter* (which had merits lacking in *The Draughtsman's Contract*); *The Glittering Prizes*, *The Imitation Game* and *Looks and Smiles*, each of which had roots in popular iconography, and drew confidence and power from it (compared, for instance, with the narrow, vapid references of *The Ploughman's Lunch*). If the new industry can reap the benefits of both popular film and popular television, both the industry and the public should be glad. And the government, too.

So what should the government do? There are two agendas, one familiar, the other not. The government should accept both, and take action at the beginning of the new session. Legislation on the new industry should complement, not derive from, legislation on cable and other related matters. Film and cable are inseparable. Hints from Victoria Street that the department will not decide on film until it has completed the legislation on cable (i.e., to be realistic, not until February 1984) suggest a film policy that is half-hearted or worse. The industry needs a decision on both this autumn.

The first, familiar agenda has fairly widespread support (with one significant exception, which we will treat later). It has three main points.

1. The core of any sensible government strategy is a coherent set of ministerial responsibilities for the new industry, including film, television and video. It's a difficult package, because it mixes art, technology, business and culture; but unless we get it right all future government action will be flawed. Fortunately, Kenneth Baker is probably better placed

to recognise the need for a restructuring of departmental responsibilities than any other minister. His own ministerial portfolio was formed precisely to bring together a number of linked areas that were languishing in different departments and different divisions; and the results have been a success.

Second, the same report, *Cable Systems*, by the Prime Minister's Information Technology Advisory Panel, that persuaded the Cabinet to give its support to multi-channel cable systems, spoke eloquently on the very issue. Its final paragraph states, 'We believe that only through a set of speedy, positive and radical regulatory changes can the UK obtain the benefits offered by developments in cable technology.' Earlier, it says, 'cable systems exemplify perfectly the inappropriateness of present arrangements.' Film, television and video, likewise. The important thing is to get the structure and the ministerial responsibilities right; whether or not the minister has cabinet rank (as proposed by ACTT and BPPA) is secondary.

2. A new advisory council should be set in tandem with the new department. It should have statutory powers to be consulted by the minister, to undertake research, to call for evidence and to publish reports concerning (i) government policy and (ii) the industry. It could be called the National Films Council; or more dramatically, the National Video Council. In each case it would take over the work of the Cinematograph Films Council and the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry, which are already edging towards some kind of merger. Its brief would be wider, however, than the CFC's and wider even than the IAC's; it should see itself as the promoter of the entire industry of moving images, both here and abroad.

3. The levy mechanism should be maintained; but the flow of money should be redirected. A levy is an excellent device for redistributing money within a closed system. It was originally intended to take some of the box-office profits generated by (largely American) popular films and give to the producers of (largely British) films. Thirty years later, it has two basic flaws. The amount of money is diminishing. And instead of taking from the rich and giving mostly to the poor it now takes from the poor (which is why it produces less money than it did) and gives a bit to the rich, who don't really need it, and a bit to the poor, who want more.

The easiest solution, reportedly favoured by Iain Sproat, was to abolish such a device since it was clearly anachronistic. But the need for financial support is as great as ever. It is needed as an incentive to investment in all films; to support, both financially and in the giving of advice, young and tyro film-makers to produce work that may be innovative and experimental; to finance more training. And perhaps to support cinemas that are in difficulty, usually in the funding of capital investments. There are many proposals to extend the levy to provide sufficient funds. It is absurd that

cinemas, whose films account for only 3 per cent of total film viewing, should provide 100 per cent of the cash. There is an overwhelming case that the showing of a film on any media should be liable to levy. Broadcast TV, satellite TV and cable TV should contribute their share. The rate of the levy could be calculated according to the fee paid for film rights or the number of viewers. Other proposals call for a levy on blank videotapes and on pre-recorded video cassettes and discs.

A Tory government might react instinctively against such a proposal. It would be regarded as a tax on success, penalising the entrepreneur who makes a profit and rewarding failure. Such criticism entirely misses the point. The film industry has not operated in an open market for decades, and the new industry is similarly constrained, because of the dominant position of the BBC and IBA/ITCA, and the less significant but still influential position of EMI and Rank.

To take action on the items on the first agenda, however, one does need the support of the BBC and IBA/ITCA. In spite of

The government must do for the moving image what it did for information technology

some rational, lucid and persuasive manifestos by the BFI and AIP (which hint at a broad consensus) the broadcasting organisations are unlikely to offer much support, neither soon enough nor convincingly enough. In mid-August the best hope seemed to be some kind of premium on the ITV levy; but the Treasury was expected to put up stiff opposition. And, anyway, ITV finances are not the concern of the Department of Trade and Industry but of the Home Office, whose job is to protect the standards of the existing over-the-air broadcasting services. So the arguments go round and round; and, meanwhile, fewer people go to the cinema and the levy fund gets smaller and smaller. Even after meeting the ebullient Kenneth Baker, few film people were optimistic.

Perhaps they are wrong. It is high time to return to the second agenda. Instead of worrying about recycling a diminishing pot of money between film-makers, distributors and exhibitors, the new agenda looks at the audience. Instead of trying to resolve the problems of an industry tied to old methods of exhibition, the new agenda looks forward to exploiting the new technologies of distribution. Its concern is the audience

for moving images; whether sitting in a cinema, watching broadcast television, subscribing to cable television or watching a rented cassette.

This strategy is closely tied to the government's own strategy for communications; and Mr Baker himself has staked considerable effort and prestige on the strategy's success. Without a flourishing industry, generating massive amounts of fiction, documentary and other material, the much-vaunted cable systems will not attract enough subscribers to pay the very high capital costs of installation and operation (and the government will find that British Telecom buys up the private investment and gives way to the Labour proposals for a national BT network). Indeed, government policy on cable implies a strong, vigorous industry. Moving images are the motive power of cable. Without them the systems will wither, and the government's grand strategy will come to an ignominious end.

The review of film policy now taking place thus has one item on the agenda. The government must do for the moving image what it did for information technology. And Mr Baker is the right man in the right ministerial job at the right time. With IT, he raised public consciousness, pushed hundreds of small companies to grow and expand, created waves of publicity for their efforts, and was indefatigable in their support. He played the Whitehall machinery for all it was worth, getting the Prime Minister's support and finding grants and monies in all kinds of places.

With the moving image, the possibilities are just as great. For a start, he could declare 1984 to be British Film Year, just as 1982 was Information Technology Year. He could, immediately, push the cable authority to be as concerned about encouraging the right circumstances for British films and programmes as the IBA is about protecting ITV production resources; put some real support behind education and training, at all levels; give support (as he did with IT Year) to artists wanting to experiment with computer animation; give support to regional activities; work out ways of turning run-down cinemas into lively, convivial multi-purpose centres of local arts and culture (local councils and the ACTT could help) and much more.

The effect of such a wide strategy would be to bring film, TV and video into the mainstream of public policy, both nationally and at the local level. Some people in the film industry will not relish this shift; while others may appreciate the reasons but suspect the manner in which it will be done. The old barons will not readily give up their powers. But, such defensive measures apart, the opportunity to escape from the circular arguments over film policy that have stifled progress for the last ten years should not be missed. It is too good a chance. As the government reassembles this autumn, and the Cabinet looks once again at its IT and communications policies, it should recognise that the industry of the moving image should take centre stage. ■

In 1981 I published some pieces in SIGHT AND SOUND dealing with the optimistic signs of life emerging from Polish cinema. The hope that this would flourish has been strangled, like so many hopes, by a military dictatorship. Now that Poland has lost its commissar-style government, if only nominally, it is possible to suggest the immediate direction open to what has been the country's foremost cultural industry.

In its brief time as a legal mass movement, Solidarity enabled Polish cinema to shrug off years of accumulated guilt, guilt at the ambivalent relationship it necessarily had with the state in order to obtain finance for production. The industry began to breathe openly for the first time since the war. The script of *Man of Iron*, which had lain idle for over a decade because it was too 'sensitive' for the authorities, was produced, and Wajda swept the international prizes. Aleksander Scibor-Rylski, writer of both *Man of Iron* and *Man of Marble*, sadly died in Warsaw this past April at the early age of fifty-five. An immense loss to Polish cinema but, unfortunately, not the only note of gloom.

Before Solidarity, Polish cinema occupied two utterly divorced worlds, the officially loved and the officially semi-tolerated. It has long been the case that the Polish films most widely respected outside the country have been those receiving least state support and the briefest of domestic distribution. The films made by Wajda, Zanussi, Kieslowski, Holland and Falk—renowned directors all—have not only been artistically successful abroad but also touched the minds and feelings of Poles. To differing degrees, they were all based on a quality of calculated allusiveness, making their critiques of contemporary Polish society through a variety of metaphoric techniques. Sometimes the films seemed enigmatic to Western audiences, but their disguised references to internal problems made tremendous impact on Polish viewers. Their achievements were not merely cinematic but political, a cunning art of inventive criticism that occasionally managed to sneak past rather dim censors. They were all fortunate in those days to be living under the relatively relaxed Gierek regime, some of whose members thought it chic to mingle with and encourage such politically risqué artists.

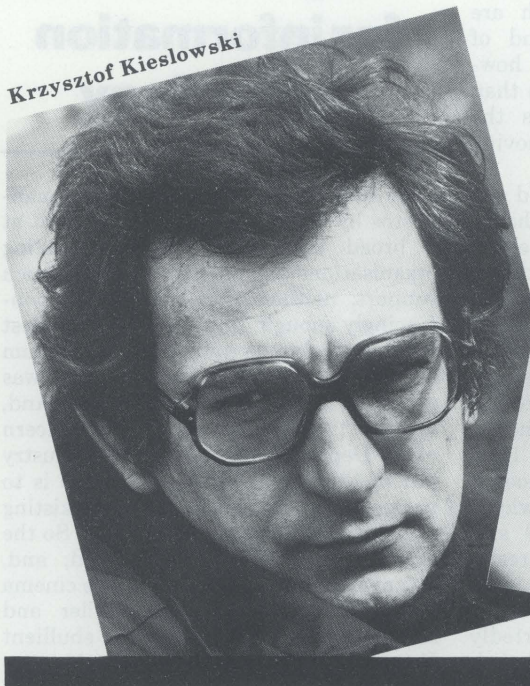
Simultaneously the industry possessed, and these are the individuals now coming into dominant policy-making positions, directors whose work is notable mainly for its mediocrity. These directors, such as Ryszard Filipiński, Bogdan Poreba, Ewa and Czesław Petelski (a husband-and-wife team churning out the same war movie for years, just changing the titles slightly), specialised in large budget glossy historical costume dramas (Filipiński always casting himself in the starring role), humourless comedies and imitative thrillers. We never see their products in the West, largely because we have superior tripe factories. This isn't snobbishness; their work tends to be disliked in Poland too, since there it stands out as

VOLKSFILM FOR THE 1980s

Gary Mead

Prospects for Polish Cinema after Martial Law

Krzysztof Kieslowski



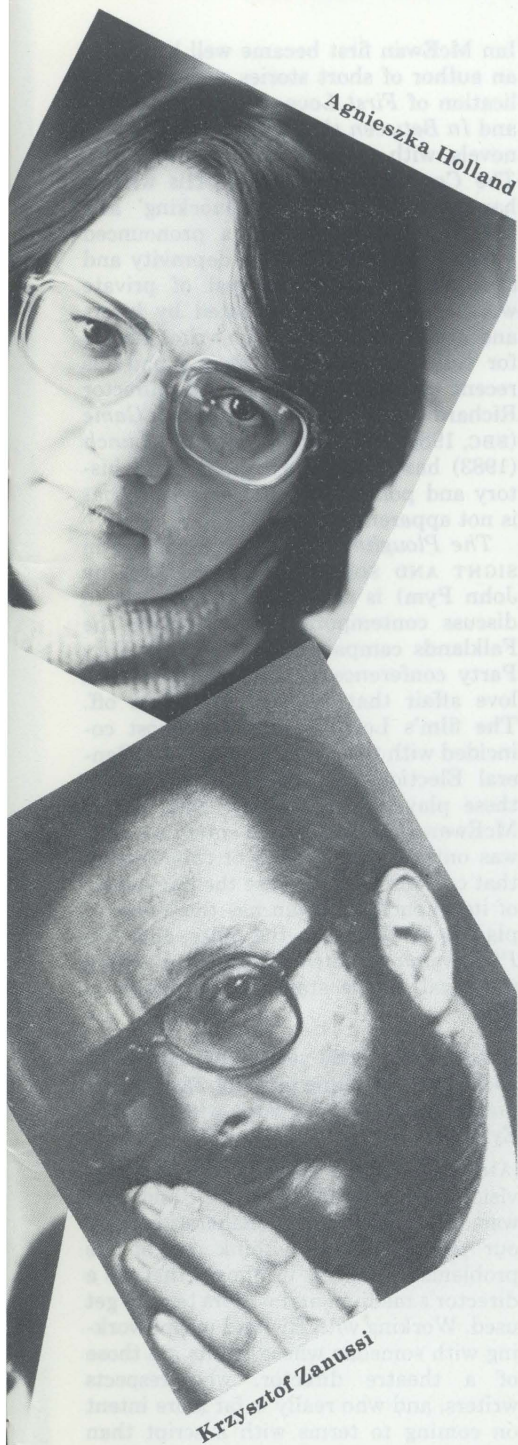
Andrzej Wajda



even more artificial and contrived.

The state of Polish cinema now is quite simple on one level. The regime's policy is to discourage and hinder the former group, Wajda *et al*, and to promote Filipiński's style of operation. Coincidentally, Filipiński and Poreba are ultra-orthodox, politically. If you wish to make films in today's Poland, then you have to toe the Party line. In other words, the cultural policy of the current government is to

de-intellectualise not only the cinema but all the arts, in order to make them more 'popular' and 'accessible' to 'the masses'. The fact that the masses queued for hours to see *Man of Iron* and fled for the exit sign with *Polonia Restituta* (Filipiński's last blockbuster) has no effect. The Minister of Culture knows what is best for Polish cinemagoers, and it's going to be based on lowest common denominator values, not some obscure and probably



Agnieszka Holland

Krzysztof Zanussi

stresses that Wajda and the rest will be able to find roles 'appropriate' to their calibre, whatever this means. The latest Polish movie to hit the screens from Bialystock to Bydgoszcz is *She-Wolf*, a schlock-horror so bad that it's only frightening because it makes the blood chill to think the Ministry of Culture should see such sub-Hammer stuff as the future course for socialist cinema. What is showing in Polish cinemas is indicative of the overall decline—none of the 1970s classics produced domestically, only a diet of Hollywood flops that are cheap to buy (Spielberg's *1941*), and such ancient hits as *Butch Cassidy*, *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. All these are cheap, entertaining without being dangerous, and help the attendance figures.

Poland's quality cinema is now either silent or working in exile. Wajda's *Danton*, widely panned by official reviewers in Poland, has been removed from distribution for political reasons. He is now putting the finishing touches to a West German-French financed movie based on a story by Rolf Hochhuth. *Love in Germany* was to be partly produced with Polish cash and Wajda wanted to use Polish actors, but the authorities withdrew the money and forbade the actors to participate. He plans to follow up with a film to be shot in Poland, dealing with the life of Janusz Korczak, which like *Love in Germany* will be scripted by Agnieszka Holland. Korczak was a left-wing educationalist working in the first decades of this century. The chances of Wajda getting state funding for the film are unknown, but the recent developments in the Polish Film-Makers' Union are indicative of the strength of feeling against him and Holland, feeling directly manipulated by the government.

Wajda has been chairman of the board of the union (FMU) for many years, and one intention of the regime has long been to oust him and his associates from their popular leadership. As with all cultural associations, the FMU was suspended at the onset of military rule, and the fear among the membership was that it would suffer the same fate as the rest, disbandment and reforming on orthodox lines, under manipulable leadership.

Rather than have this, Wajda offered to resign in early 1982, on condition that the FMU would be able to hold a congress and elect its own fresh leadership, for which he would not stand. This was agreed to only in June this year, when the whole board resigned along with Wajda. The congress is being held in September, and clearly the hope of Wajda and his associate film-makers has been that the new leadership will be acceptable to the authorities without being simple mouthpieces for official doctrines of 'populist' cinema.

Wajda and senior colleagues at his production unit, *Zespół X*, had been fired by the Ministry of Culture in May, though Wajda was permitted to remain as an attached director of the unit. Perhaps the best picture of the regime's future policy concerning cinema is gained from a meeting between certain 'safe' film-makers and the Culture Department

of the Central Committee, which took place in March 1982. The whole transcript of the meeting is printed in *New Criterion* (USA) October 1982.

The Central Committee caucus presented a paper stating that the FMU had been penetrated since 1976 by 'anarcho-syndicalist elements' and had been led by film-makers 'after power'. The 'moral anxiety' trend in Polish cinema was 'particularly damaging', and while directors such as Filipiński and Poreba applied this trend in a constructive manner, following the Party line, others were 'oppositionist, demagogic and existential.' *Zespół X* was singled out for special attack; 'every second film of this unit had to be withdrawn from distribution.' The paper went on to condemn Ryszard Bugajski's *Investigation* (some English versions refer to it as *Interrogation*), a fictional movie dealing with police methods in the Stalinist period. The film circulates in video form in Poland, and has Krystyna Janda in a leading role. According to the Central Committee, the film 'should never be shown in a socialist country', and I don't expect we'll stand much chance of seeing it in the capitalist ones either.

Wajda's dismissal, for making films 'which had nothing in common with the cultural policy of the state' (Zygulski), symbolises the ruthlessness with which the present regime is determined to root out any trace of opposition in the cinema. Wajda, it should be remembered, was never the most outspoken of critics of the socialist state in Poland. Those directors who were considerably more frank, such as Kieslowski or Falk, are likely to be fairly paralysed by the Ministry of Culture. Although there will not be any retrospective censoring of already completed films, the Ministry has the option to prevent the screening of any film, and therefore *Man of Iron* and the other excellent movies of the 1970-81 period are unlikely to be seen for a very long time. A Deputy Minister of Culture, with responsibility for cinema, is Piotr Stepanski, and he led the Central Committee attack on Wajda and Bugajski in March 1982. I'm sure he's looking forward to Poreba's latest product with relish—a costume biopic of Sikorski, rumoured to have been murdered at Churchill's behest. Or maybe he's already casting for *Daughter of She-Wolf*. ■

dangerous intellectual claptrap from Wajda.

The Minister concerned, Kazimierz Zygułski, is just right for the job. He likes to present himself as an 'expert' on popular culture, and is on record as saying that Polish culture in the 1980s should become a model of 'culture clad in folk costume'. This takes us back to the 1950s and a form of prehistoric vulgar Marxism long buried, or so we hoped. He pointedly

Gary Mead returned from Poland in July, where he had lived and worked since 1979, as a British Council lecturer. He also works as a freelance journalist, writing in the past under the byline 'Gustaw Moszcz' as 'New Statesman' Polish correspondent, for *SIGHT AND SOUND* and elsewhere. In May 1983 he was arrested by the Polish secret police and detained for forty-eight hours. Although charged with 'publication of false information' and with being in contact with delegatised Solidarity, he was finally permitted to leave Poland with no case brought to court.

JILL FORBES questioned screenwriter

CROSSOVER: McEwan & Eyre

Richard Eyre (left) and Ian McEwan.



Ian McEwan first became well known as an author of short stories with the publication of *First Love*, *Last Rites* (1975) and *In Between the Sheets* (1978) and of novels with *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort of Strangers*. His writing has been described as 'shocking' and 'morbid'; his fiction has a pronounced interest in perversity and depravity and specialises in the portrayal of private worlds such as those created by lovers and children. But he also writes drama for television and the cinema and his recent collaboration with the director Richard Eyre on *The Imitation Game* (BBC, 1980) and *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983) has revealed a concern with history and politics and public events that is not apparent in his fiction.

The Ploughman's Lunch (reviewed in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1983, by John Pym) is a film which sets out to discuss contemporary reality, with the Falklands campaign and the 1982 Tory Party conference as the backcloth to a love affair that never quite comes off. The film's London opening almost coincided with the announcement of a General Election in which events such as these played a major part and, as Ian McEwan explains in this interview, this was only one of a series of coincidences that conspired to increase the immediacy of its impact. McEwan has the knack of placing his finger on the pulse, and *The Ploughman's Lunch* stands as a telling portrayal of the state of the nation in 1983.

J.F.

JILL FORBES: Could you tell me something about how you came to write *The Ploughman's Lunch* and to work with Richard Eyre?

IAN McEWAN: We made a film for television [*The Imitation Game*], and that was a very successful collaboration from our point of view. I think one of the problems for writers in films is that it's a director's medium and writers tend to get used. Working with Richard meant working with someone whose habits are those of a theatre director, who respects writers, and who really is far more intent on coming to terms with a script than trying to get writers to produce scripts which feed into directorial fantasies. I wrote a first draft, and of course Richard and I talked, and second draft changes were largely to do with incorporating the Falklands into the film. But any changes Richard suggests are always towards ways of saying better what you are already saying, rather than barging in with 'Why don't we make the man a rat and the woman a cockroach...?' So I felt confidence in him and, perhaps more importantly, I felt a shared 'world view'. Having made a film set in 1940, we both wanted to make a film set in the present, and we shared the feeling that whereas the American cinema, or for that matter Hungarian, or Italian or French cinema, managed to reflect some contemporary

Ian McEwan on his collaboration with...

reality, we had very little in British cinema that showed us ourselves. That was, very loosely, where we began.

Did you receive development money?

No. I started writing in April 1981, but the film wasn't, in a sense, set up. There was talk of Channel 4 funding, but at that time Channel 4 hadn't got on the air, and there was—no doubt very creative—chaos. So I made a virtue of necessity and decided that the best way to maintain control (I can't think of a better word) was simply to take a year of my own time. I proceeded in a very leisurely way, telling Richard I was writing him a film. But we didn't talk for a long time after that, though I had a working title—*The Ploughman's Lunch*.

I had told Richard that little anecdote ['The ploughman's lunch is a completely successful fabrication of the past' on the part of advertising men] and we both agreed it was a good starting point. It proceeded outwards from that, and what I did was to mooch around: I went to the Greenham Common peace camp, I went to Poland, I went to the Conservative and Labour Party conferences. I asked to spend a day watching the television news being made and, by a series of Chinese whispers on the phone, the message got relayed wrongly and I ended up going to Radio News. But as soon as I stepped in there I thought this is where the film must be. It was perfect! It had ... a paradoxical quality: something of the dowdiness of a staff common room in a rather cheesy boys' grammar school, but clearly also the voice of the State was emanating from this place. You expected to see dust, chalk dust ...

Why did you go to the newsroom?

One idea was that contemporary 'reality' is something that people make up. We have to have the world interpreted to us, and just as we were proceeding from the idea of the ploughman's lunch and the fake past, I also wanted to have some fake present. That's not to talk cynically because novelists themselves create fake realities. News is a form of fiction and I wanted to see how it's made. As soon as I walked into the newsroom I knew I wanted a character who worked there. It was the year of the Royal Wedding, and for a long time I thought the film was going to be about the press corps in relation to the Royal Family. When I went to the Party conferences I became quite determined that the film should end at the Conservative Party conference, and towards the end of that year I had become fairly certain that what I wanted to write was a love story whose ins and outs would, in some way, reflect some of the ins and outs and deceptions and alliances of the Suez crisis ... I wanted to find a metaphor that would work in two directions, both for private deceit and national deceit or, more crucially, forms of private self-delusion. I think the most potent lies are the ones we tell

ourselves, and this is even more so on a national level.

So when the lecturer asks, 'Can we talk about nations behaving as people?' he is asking a question central to the film?

The lecture is key to the first draft of the film, where it's actually all there in one great block on the page. I didn't really think Richard would want to shoot it like that. It would be filmically disastrous. Together we worked out a more dramatically acceptable way, which was to have James record the lecture and then spread it over three places. The lecturer does talk about Suez and the nation being 'an affair of the heart' and he's saying that over the tape just before we watch James stick up the *Vogue* picture of Ann and Susan Barrington on top of the Suez map. So clearly we are talking about the two things being parallel. Similarly, at one point Richard chose to go from the brown of the map of Egypt to the brown of the Norfolk landscape.

Why is James writing a book particularly about Suez?

What he sees is Britain sending off an invasion fleet, just as it did from Malta in 1956, with some chance of success. And if this is to succeed, and the general climate of opinion is wholly behind it, then this would be a very opportune time to present to Goldbooks the publishers the possibility of writing something which fits. The news that fits. The news on Suez is no longer to be that of national humiliation. James wants us to believe it unfortunate that it failed. A mistake but an honourable attempt, and we should get over all this stuff about deceit.

Paradoxically, that would bring James close to the peace camps, wouldn't it? With the whole anti-American thrust of Suez ...?

The Ploughman's Lunch: Frank Finlay, as the director of television commercials, busy marketing the past.



He has got to write a pro-American book. He has to be very careful and that's why he says that a good ally is one who tells you when you're making mistakes, and in that respect the Americans were good allies. Of course, it's nonsense. The Americans were atrocious allies. It was when they saw the odds were stacked that they pulled the plug. In fact, Dulles is reported to have said to Selwyn Lloyd, from his hospital bed, 'Why on earth didn't you go on? You didn't have to pay any attention to us. We had to say what we were saying in order to maintain our peace with the Arab world.' So I think there was a great deal of duplicity in the American position, almost as much as in the British one. James is well aware that he has to steer carefully through this: he's writing history to order.

Is there a sense in which this generation is now rewriting its history?

I don't see it as a film about a generation at all. They are my age, but they are singularly untouched by what I would regard as the formative time, which would be the late 1960s. So in this respect I would regard them as slightly anomalous. I think it was possible for lots of ambitious people to come pouring out of Oxford and Cambridge and hardly be touched by the move towards political radicalism in this country, but just hunt down the jobs in town in their third year, and wonder if they'll get that place with *Vogue* or on the BBC's trainee director course, or whatever people were pushing into. These people in the film are contemporaries, but the film wasn't meant to suggest that this is what happened to the generation of '48 or the class of '69.

I went to see the film during the election campaign, and the audience was obviously responding to its immediacy. At the same

Richard Eyre on **The Ploughman's Lunch**

time, it seems to me that the film refuses to expose a certain position, or has, in the post-modernist version, a kind of self-reflectiveness which impedes the presentation of a single point of view.

The film certainly doesn't tell people to go out and vote Labour. I wanted to draw attention to a set of relations between things, rather than saying aren't these people horrid? They are, but in ways that nearly everyone is. I don't think their horridness is so spectacular: it's not the horridness of Jacobean drama. It's the sort of half lie, the sliding truth, the change of register when you talk to one person and then to another. So although they are moral monsters, they're quite a common breed. It wasn't my intention to do anything other than point towards certain kinds of relationships between private and public behaviour, the way people can act in bad faith when there's nothing around them to which they can attach any good faith. Now, this is to some extent the fault of the Left, but that seems to me another problem, and one that I couldn't possibly propose solutions to in terms of a film, or in terms of anything else.

What about what one might call the positives? Aren't they slightly naive—James' father, the peace camp women...?

I wanted to propose people who were actually in good faith and watch James react to them—by that time we can watch over his shoulder—with a kind of distanced contempt, politeness, horrified that anyone should be so earnest about anything as to do something so futile as to camp in a bog outside an airfield. I think one of the main strands of the bad faith of James' milieu is that as soon as anyone appears too earnest they expose

their flank and appear foolish. I hoped to make the audience laugh at the people at the poetry reading. I wanted them to share and to feel horribly on the side of James, because I didn't want James to be an improbably nasty fellow. I wanted some kind of recognition that we *all* love to watch earnest people put down. It's a national characteristic.

Against James' urbanity, his worldly pragmatism, the Greenham Common women just look silly for being so friendly. A few people said, 'You've got it all wrong, the women aren't like that; and they get a lot of media attention.' But the fact is that during the Falklands crisis they didn't, and they were desperate. When we went down there, they were at work, and they felt that part of their work was to communicate with the press. If the press didn't come they were not exactly wasting their time, since they had a commitment to being there which was beyond propaganda. But they did feel a great need to communicate. And they weren't intellectuals, they weren't Marxist feminist intellectuals. A lot of them were just ordinary, pleasant housewives. Later on, when the thing got going and the weather got better, there were probably lots of other people around, but at that point when they were weathering it out, they were just local women who had marched from Wales. It was a shame that Greenham Common became so famous later that people thought we were being opportunist.

Is there an element of pastoralism here? I notice that Norfolk figures from time to time in your writing...

Pastoral is important because you can no longer go anywhere in the English countryside without your peace being

shattered by low flying jets. It's true of Norfolk but also of the Yorkshire Dales, of the Lake District. Young men are learning to fly combat aircraft as if we were gearing up for a war. If James was having his conversation with Ann Barrington, the historian, interrupted by aircraft, what should be his relationship to that?

And Norfolk?

I was a year at the University of East Anglia and I sometimes go to write there. At Cley you find the largest salt marsh in Europe and yet it's the English countryside. Again, we have an image of the countryside put out by margarine ads which is, I'd say, Home Counties, rolling, with mature deciduous trees, smallholdings and hedgerows. The reality is not only that the hedgerows are disappearing and there's Dutch elm disease, but that there are other forms of countryside that are actually quite beautiful, powerful and English. We were both keen to have an image that was not the traditional one, and we enjoyed having Rosemary Harris and Jonathan Pryce walking across a great expanse of sand talking about the collapse of the postwar Labour government.

So when the Falklands happened, did you decide to incorporate it?

It was a great gift. It started almost as soon as I finished the script. I couldn't quite believe it: an Armada leaving Portsmouth! There were a number of points at which events seemed to play into the script. For example, the scene with the poet and James and Jeremy when they remark, 'Blasé and epicene, it perfectly describes the new Foreign Secretary.' A couple of weeks after I wrote that, the Foreign Secretary resigned and there was

The Ploughman's Lunch: Rosemary Harris and Jonathan Pryce in Norfolk.



a new Foreign Secretary, who could be conceived of as 'blasé and epicene'. The scene between Ann Barrington and James where she's saying 'My first husband worked for the BBC and was involved in preserving their independence during the Suez crisis ...' All that needed was a shift in stress to, 'My husband ...' and then I just added 'He'd be useful to them now' because at that time the BBC were involved in arguments about their impartiality over Falklands reporting. There are all kinds of little points which suggest political events or national events that the film had somehow grown out of. It was partly because I took such a long time researching it that the momentum of events somehow managed to feed back into it.

Whose footage of the Conservative Party conference was it?

Ours. That was the first week's shooting.

It seemed to me that apart from one shot with Michael Heseltine it could have been a montage.

No, it couldn't possibly. There's a slow pan off Margaret Thatcher to Jonathan Pryce biting his nails, and she is in shot with him framing the whole of the rest of the screen. It was all shot there in the last two days of the conference, and it wasn't clear what would happen because we had to shoot all that first, before the main shoot. We were having problems with our permissions up to the last moment, but we got in quite successfully because we had Channel 4's blessing and, through them, a connection with ITN. And we had official permission from the Tory Party. We went in as ourselves, shooting a feature film, a romantic comedy! They had seen the script and they had no objection to it.

But you do cut the speeches. For example, the Thatcher speech about 'telling the people the truth' becomes a very poignant commentary on the film.

The conference is the kind of reality you behave selectively towards, just as you behave selectively towards all your material. I sort of wrote their speeches in advance and they seemed to give them more or less word for word. I went the year before and I knew the kind of things that happened. The script simply gave the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister lines about national identity, destiny and the younger generation. Resounding phrases about the nation. And they repeated them. Of course, they were talking about the Falklands as well, and it couldn't have been better unless they had actually been making speeches about Suez. But credit for all that should also go to Clive Tickner and a tiny crew wielding a 35mm camera in such a limited space, and to Richard Eyre for devising some kind of logic for the sequence.

Are James' class and background important? He seems very precisely placed.

They have to do with one of the central

preoccupations of the film. James denies his past. He's a lower middle class boy who wants to succeed in a certain world which ends up rejecting him.

Is his the same milieu as that of the family in *The Imitation Game*?

James' is slightly lower down. Cathy's father [in *The Imitation Game*] is a small town accountant with definite pretensions. Fascinating this talk of where people stand—the consolations of the British, the class system! But it seems quite clear to me that James' parents' gloomy terraced house underneath the M4 is a couple of points down from Cathy's father's nice house in Frinton. The fact that Cathy can play the piano and speak a little German has to do with her father's ambitions; the fact that James is in the newsroom has to do with his own. I should also say that his family didn't exist in the first draft, but was a response to suggestions by Richard that we had a character but didn't know where he came from. In fact, it gave the film much more of the sense of journeying to have those phone calls back to his mother and also to end in the graveyard. Before, it ended with the clink of glasses to History. As soon as Richard said, 'He has to come from somewhere,' I knew immediately where he came from.

Could you say something about the way your screenplays relate to the rest of your work. There seems to be a great difference between your stories and your dramatic work.

I think that's so. In a discussion after a screening of *The Ploughman's Lunch* we were talking about how certain young English writers have written about a sense of betrayal from the Left and written plays about the War or have used the War as a starting point. We were talking about David Hare in that respect. And I said this was more true of dramatists than novelists and I couldn't really isolate novelists' interests in the same way. Someone else said, 'You yourself represent this kind of split: as a novelist you don't talk about these things, and yet as a screenplay writer or a television writer, you do.' It certainly is the case that when I write fiction I find myself more interested in psychological states, which I think is something that film doesn't do very well, or not with any great finesse, or with a great deal of pretension, and that when I undertake to write dialogue I seem instantly to be in another frame of mind. I get into another gear, I seem to want to take on themes that are more broadly political.

I certainly don't want to locate the explanation in the nature of film or fiction. Clearly it was possible once, and some writers would argue it still is possible—American writers think it still is possible—to write the novel of Society. I'm sure there are also film-makers who think film is very suitable for the investigation of individual frames of mind ...

Perhaps for me it has to do with what it means to know that you don't have to collaborate with anybody, the freedom that gives you to make an inner journey ... David Hare has an interesting line about how drama, by its very nature, tends to lead to some kind of social critique.

David Hare seems to have a particularly authoritative status among his contemporaries.

I find myself interested in all the things he does. And when I was reading through all the vast number of books on Suez, one of the most thrilling bits of rereading I did was the Suez scene from *Plenty*. If there were a Desert Island Discs of scenes from plays, then I'd be taking that scene, which I think is magic, quite brilliant. What we have in common, I think, is a desire to write about the way we are now by reference to the past. And I would say that in terms of drama (TV and films) the things David does have been the richest, the most resonant. I think he has a very strong voice, and his ambivalence is very much to my taste.

What you say might suggest that the novel and short story are marginal genres. They reach a much smaller audience than television.

I think argument from numbers is irrelevant. Otherwise we'd all end up writing for TV. I'm not at all convinced that having five million people watch *Play for Today* means more than having a few hundred people a week go to the Gate. I don't think writing about social issues is the only thing you can be doing: I don't think it's the most important thing, though it's an important thing. But the relation between people's behaviour and their unconscious or their own private past, for example, is also crucial, and I think fiction is a very fine tool for examining states of mind. Novels at their best are complex things with lives of their own. They tend to make political points that are so broad you'd have to call them moral points, if they make those at all.

For some people the numbers are important, they are excited by large audiences.

I quite like the compromise by which one can make a film, show it to a cinema audience and then have it on television. I think that's probably an ideal relationship to have with TV. You know that your film will go on existing after it has been shown, it can occasionally reappear on some late night show, and it will also join the list of all the good and bad films that were ever made. Television films, if you're lucky, get repeated, and then they don't exist. I have a novelist's instinct which tells me that if anything is going to have any worth it must persist in the culture. It must become part of the conversation. Television, however brilliant, defeats itself by its own abundance.

Ann Barrington's remark about us being

the Channel to observe the shooting

in danger of sinking into a perpetual present would apply to television?

Television is a perpetual present. The most successful things are TV reflecting its present: sport, news, panel games, sitcoms, where whatever is stated is replaced by something else that is stated. Maybe videotapes are going to change this. But a feature movie seems to me closer to a book. It can exist, it can go on to a shelf and people can choose to see it again. I really enjoyed making *The Imitation Game* with Richard. We were treated very well by television and given freedom. But one particular pleasure was managing to get it published. I thought it was the nearest we could get to it persisting. We explored quite vigorously the possibility of some arrangement whereby it could have a limited release, but it was impossible. Films and novels have an edge on TV that it's hard to get around. I'm working with Bertolucci at the moment, and one of the extraordinary things is to be talking to a true cinéaste who seems to have seen every film ever made and to remember every shot in it ... in other words, he has the memory of a good literary critic. I doubt if you could meet a téléaste. I doubt if there are people who could remember that wonderful wide-angled studio shot in that early *Panorama!* TV's much more functional.

What about the duty to be a historian, the question of the popular memory that Ann Barrington raises?

The irony is that the woman who says this deludes herself into falling in love with a young shit whom she takes to be an idealist, and has also heavily compromised her own past, so you have to take it within its context. What she says is drawn from Kundera, and it's something that I feel is right. However, Ann retreats into the private life, which seems to me a course that many people take, one with which I sympathise. You can't spend your life being in opposition all the time. It does something corrosive to the spirit, and many fine intelligences, having attended meetings and jumble sales and marches, at some point in their lives are probably going to say, 'It's not changing. Let someone else do the work. I'm going to cultivate my garden.' For that reason, although the historian is undone by wish fulfilment, she has authority when she says that everyone needs to have some historical sense: the nation that dozes off into a perpetual present is easily tyrannised.

And after *The Ploughman's Lunch*? You mentioned Bertolucci.

I'm writing a script for him based on a Moravia novel, 1934, set in Capri in 1934. We're getting towards the final stages and I hope we'll shoot next spring. After that I have to get on with some fiction. Too much collaboration is not good for one. It's nice as a break but I have to return to base, which must always be fiction. □



Screenwriter Maggie Brooks and director Richard Eyre.

Over docks on a Sunday breakfast-time; mid-June, but shiveringly cool. Cars are lined up double file awaiting the signal to drive on to the Ostend ferry. The couple at the rear of one queue, engrossed in the tabloids ('Joan Slaps Ban on Nude Photo'), remain oblivious to the flurry of activity which surrounds the appearance alongside of a bright red jeep of the 'do it yourself' variety.

This is the start of the third week's shooting on Richard Eyre's *Loose Connections*, in which the jeep occupies a central role. While its 'co-stars' Stephen Rea and Lindsay Duncan stand off to one side swaddled in anoraks, Eyre and his cinematographer Clive Tickner (previously collaborators on *The Ploughman's Lunch*) block out a shot. The hitch is that the unit is itself embarking for the Continent, and as the deadline nears the camera truck is still in the toils of customs inspection. Just in time ('Another exercise in SAS filming,' murmurs Eyre) it arrives on the scene; the jeep's sideview mirrors are adjusted to prevent the truck's reflection making an unwanted guest appearance, and an assistant feeds Lindsay Duncan with successive GB stickers to facilitate the business of the shot. All is well and attention rapidly turns to the other half of the scene, involving Stephen Rea in a brief dialogue exchange with a fellow motorist, for which cameo role the assistant producer, Paul Cowan, has been enlisted. (Since the location is more than 65 miles from Charing Cross, industry agreements on use of extras don't apply.)

Loose Connections, a road movie-cum-romantic comedy, which Eyre jokingly describes as a kind of latter-day *It Happened One Night*, is the first produced screenplay by Maggie Brooks, a TV playwright, National Film School graduate and one-time assistant film editor—the practical experience of which, she

maintains, has come in handy for screenwriting. The idea for what she terms a 'linear' script ('Nothing autobiographical about it') germinated from a half-heard radio item, and the storyline involves an ill-assorted couple driving from London to Munich. The writer, addicted to tea-drinking and the *Guardian* crossword, describes the comedy as 'hopefully gentle—smiles rather than laughs.' Somewhat unusually, she is remaining in attendance throughout the shoot: the producer, Simon Perry, pays tribute to the helpfulness of this and to her wholly 'undefensive' attitude to what she has written.

The line moves forward and the camera turns again as the flimsy jeep, with Stephen Rea in the passenger seat, is steered by Lindsay Duncan down the ramp and into the maw of the car deck. It is a shot which by definition can hardly be repeated, but the actress gamely reverses back on to the quay for a covering retake of the vehicle once more proceeding aboard, this time in improbably stately isolation. The members of the unit scramble hastily after her, and within moments the Channel ferry is casting off.

For Lindsay Duncan, this is a first outing in the cinema, after a good deal of work in theatre and television (the latter notably including the wan games mistress of Mike Leigh's *Grown-Ups*), and the fact that she has landed a leading role in one go naturally gratifies her considerably. Amid praise for script and director, she voices practical reservations only about having to drive what she calls the 'toy car', and offers alarming reminiscences of being buffeted about on the motorway earlier in the filming.

With the actors travelling in costume, and the unit now moving, as it were, on a one-way ticket, not to go home until the end of the shoot, one is tempted to

of Eyre's new film, **Loose Connections**

essay some Truffaut-ish aphorism about the film becoming the record of its own making. (Lindsay Duncan speaks, in fact, of how leaving England makes the dramatic action begin to seem 'more real'.) Despite this state of affairs, however, shooting is not altogether in sequence. The shipboard interiors have already been filmed, using an out of commission vessel berthed in Southampton, and the movie's final scenes, set (for reasons it might be unsporting to disclose) in the giant Munich football stadium, were shot in advance to take advantage of the offer of facilities. Five weeks are to be spent on the move through Belgium and Germany. Simon Perry points out wryly that German distributors approached about guarantees demurred with Teutonic efficient-mindedness over the script's sometimes wayward itinerary, apparently neglecting to countenance the characters' Anglo-Saxon propensity for losing their way.

Budgeted at £800,000—a meagre enough sum in international terms, but not inconsiderable when set against, say, the £550,000 cost of Perry's previous production, *Another Time, Another Place*—*Loose Connections* is being backed partly by the National Film Finance Corporation, which commissioned a script and subsequently passed it to Perry, and partly by Virgin Films, making a first venture into feature production in the wake of recent forays into distribution, including *The Ploughman's Lunch*, and its production, also in consort with the NFFC, of the Oscar-winning short *A Shocking Accident*.

Perry speaks of the project, with its jigsaw of locations, as being 'infinitely harder' to set up than *Another Time*, but rationalises his belief in it on the grounds of enthusiasm for the script and commitment to a 'cinema of feeling'. 'It's a comedy but one which is really about something in human terms, when three-quarters of the scripts one reads are just formula attempts at reworking action genres.' He lays stress also on its visual attributes, not just in the sense that 'we can take the punters on a bit of a European jaunt', but in the contrast, which casting has sought to emphasise, between comfortably off, liberated heroine and her *homme moyen sensuel* passenger. In this attention to a markedly differentiated couple, the film might find a link (producer as *auteur*?) with the otherwise dissimilar *Another Time, Another Place*.

For the next shot, Stephen Rea, last seen on the screen as the saxophonist of *Angel*, is required to go disconsolately slouching around the deck. Sheltering from the wind while preparations are made, Rea sniffs at a cafeteria ham sandwich with evident suspicion. Though bearing up quite cheerfully, he can hardly be feeling his best: a run in a Brian Friel play at Hampstead ended only the evening before and he was driven down to

Dover at dead of night in readiness for a dawn call.

Two teenage boys among the passengers good-naturedly allow themselves to be volunteered as extras, though one evinces momentary reluctance to betray his allegiance to Manchester United by donning the Liverpool supporter's colours called for by the script. While he is coaxed into a simulation of seasickness, his mother is moved to ask when the result of the endeavours will be 'on television', and is told that it is, rather, destined for the cinema. 'The cinema?' she responds with discouraging finality. 'Oh, we won't be seeing it then.'

Richard Eyre finds time for a few minutes' chat. 'With films, really, it's horses for courses. If you make a *Ploughman's Lunch*, you know that it can only reach a limited audience. In the theatre, I've tried, though not in any programmatic way, to alternate between specialised things and those, like *Guys and Dolls* especially, that are in a popular form. This is my first brush with popular cinema. It's genre material in a way, but it's fresh and it doesn't break faith with the feelings it's dealing with. When I read the script, I thought this was the kind of thing people would like to see at the Odeon.'

Back on deck, there is one more scene, a brief colloquy about foreign currency, to shoot before the ship docks. As the Belgian coast looms up, the sun oblig-

ingly comes out. Eyre and his players go into a huddle, as Clive Tickner, squeezed against a bulkhead with a giant bar of Toblerone protruding from his coat pocket, crouches to peer through the eyepiece. (Tickner shot not only *Ploughman's Lunch* but *Ascendancy*, whose art director Jamie Leonard is also working on this picture.)

At Ostend docks, the inevitable customs rigmarole ensues. 'A heavy production day,' sighs Perry. Coaches come lumbering out of the terminal ('Europe in 20 Days'); eventually it is possible to film a brief continuity scene of the jeep going through the passport checkpoint. 'In real life,' the assistant director calls over, 'they'd stop on this side.' (Eh—real life?) Two of the cars which the unit has hired, driven by the German production assistants, manoeuvre around to represent the vehicles between which, on the now temporarily deserted forecourt, the jeep is supposedly in convoy. Somebody complains that one of the hired cars seems to have no reverse gear. Next, out into the Ostend streets for some pick-up shots, planned to emphasise the transition to foreign soil. And then the caravan assembles itself to head toward the German border. . .

Diminished though the popular movie audience may be ('The cinema? Oh. . .'), *Loose Connections* will make a bid for it around the turn of the year.

TIM PULLEINE

Loose Connections: Lindsay Duncan and Stephen Rea.



Hell of a good sail...

**DIRECT CINEMA:
The Third Decade**

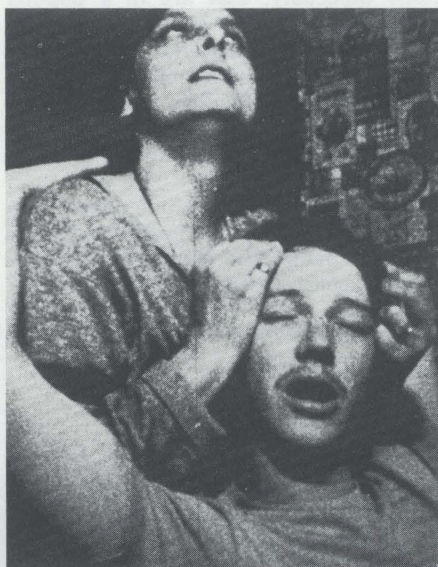
sorry, no whales.

Brian Winston

Richard Leacock recounts that Flaherty used to liken the processes of documentary film-making to old style whaling expeditions from New Bedford. A captain would interest investors in kitting out a ship and would then disappear for maybe years on end. Eventually he would return to port, and there on the quay the investors would be waiting. 'Hell of a good sail,' the captain would shout down from the bridge. 'Sorry, no whales.'

That Flaherty, who loved the climactic death of great sea creatures the way producers of old-time serials loved tying heroines to railway tracks, should choose a whaling metaphor ought not to surprise. But the image is even more apposite now in the age of Direct Cinema than it was in his day. Flaherty could, by research, script and reconstruction, guarantee that whales would at least be sighted. Today's documentarists, inhibited by the dictates of non-intervention and averse to the rigours of extensive research, can easily sail straight past any subject and frequently do. Direct Cinema, the source of the dominant documentary style, is now entering its third decade. It seems fair to ask: 'How is it doing?'

Take two recent major whaling expeditions. One, *Middletown*, the brain child of Peter Davis, was a series of films and tapes executed by various hands and aired last year on American public television. The other, *Police*, made by a team led by Roger Graef and Charles Stewart, was transmitted at much the same time by the BBC. None of these films were 'Cinéma Vérité', for all that they were everywhere so described. 'Cinéma Vérité' is a style of documentary which deliberately draws attention to the processes involved in the making of the film. It was invented, as its name clearly indicates, in France. All it has in common with the American school of 'Direct Cinema' is equipment. 'Direct Cinema' is the exact



Middletown: Seventeen (frame blow-up).

opposite of 'Cinéma Vérité'. It seeks more completely than any previous mode of documentary production to hide the processes of film-making—to pretend to an unblinking objectivity supposedly similar to that possessed by a fly on the wall. *Police* is in a pure 'Direct Cinema' mode. *Middletown* is in a less pure but more common variant of the style. Neither is 'Cinéma Vérité'.

The six segments of the *Middletown* series (only five of which were publicly seen) looked at first sight like nothing so much as re-runs of the great early Direct Cinema films. Here, as in the Leacock/Pennebaker *Primary* (1960), was the close-up on the political campaign. Here, as in Lipscomb's *Mooney v. Fowle* (also known as *Football*, 1961), was the high school sports event. Here, as in Wiseman's *High School* (1969), was the teenage subculture. After twenty years it seemed as if Direct Cinema had exhausted America. It was now doomed,

as with a grade school essay entitled 'What I did on my visit to the Midwest', to endless repetitions; not perhaps so inappropriate in this context given that the Xerox Corporation was the series underwriter.

But this was only true of the first sight. For *Middletown*, except for two of its episodes, was not really Direct Cinema at all but an ersatz variety developed in television land on both sides of the Atlantic which can best be called 'Vérité'. This is a bastard form which reduces the rigour of both Direct Cinema and 'Cinéma Vérité' practice to an easy amalgam of handheld available-light sync. shooting. 'Vérité' films contain such material, but they can also use all or any of the elements of more traditional documentaries such as commentary and interviews. Thus it is that the dominant documentary style is not Direct Cinema itself, but is rather derived from it. The subtlest deception occurs when, as with four of the *Middletown* episodes, only interviews are added to the mix. The impression is then given that Direct Cinema, implying months of filming, huge amounts of footage shot, minimal contact with subjects, is being used; but in fact 'Vérité' is at hand—which means the usual visiting TV professional firemen in the usual five-star hotels, set-up interviews (ever seen an un-set-up interview?), and careful harbouring of resources so that only certain moments in any given situation are covered. Direct Cinema might have promised more than it could ever deliver, but 'Vérité' debases that promise by playing an even greater confidence trick on the audience.

In *Middletown*, apart from the episode directed by Leacock himself and the banned segment done by his ex-pupils Joel DeMott and Jeff Kreines, the rest were testimony to how far the 'Vérité' rot has set in. In these films (and in Leacock's contribution) the use of interviews,

or situations so close to interviews that it would be positively Jesuitical to claim them as non-interventionist, is the big clue to the presence of 'Vérité'. 'Cinéma Vérité' has never caught on in the Anglo-Saxon world, being too reflexive and experimental. Direct Cinema has now been tainted so that it is just as much an endangered species.

That the *Middletown* films and tapes by and large failed to advance the art of documentary would be of little importance had they illuminated our understanding of the society they sought to portray. But what we got, with the exception of the Kreines and DeMott piece to

which we shall return below, was a tired rehash of what have now become the documentary clichés of Middle America. The series, although the high spot of last year's US output, would barely warrant attention did it not encapsulate a whole slough of problems summed up, neatly and elegantly, by its title. Each episode contained an opening credit 'From the Middletown Studies', referencing a classic work of American sociology, *Middletown* by Helen and Robert Lynd, published in 1928 and added to, as *Middletown in Transition*, in 1937.

What documentaries actually do—what is within the frame—is often at

odds with what they are supposed to do—what rhetoric surrounds their production and exhibition. Today practitioners, at least sophisticated practitioners, acknowledge the impossibility of the objectivity implied by classic documentary rhetoric. They speak instead of the inevitable subjectivity of their actual practice. But the context remains unchanged: the classic notion of objectivity and observation is still what most people mean when they think of documentary. In these circumstances too many documentarists, by less sophisticated utterance or genuine ignorance, are quick to want to have their cake and eat it.

Middletown: Films are never called 'Six days in the life of Mr and Mrs Bloggs of Acacia Avenue'..

Middletown is a classic example. A series of, by and large, predictably personal, idiosyncratic and non-representational (in any sociological sense) films and tapes is forced to assume, because of the title given it, a weight which it can in no way carry. Peter Davis, normally a lucid human being, justified the choice of title in this way: 'We tried to locate certain universal human co-ordinates in specific stories, and we were inspired in the first place by our sort of "grandparents" in this kind of study, Robert and Helen Lynd. And their study is about "Middletown". So is ours.' This apparently is the sort of talk you need to master if you are to pull in the few millions it now takes to make such a series in America. It's the kind of talk that impresses public television funding agencies and the great private corporations. That Davis was uttering these justifications as the Lynds' masterpiece was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary must only have added to the general 'sexiness' of the idea.

Such 'sexiness' necessitates the title. *Middletown* is utterly typical in this, for the world of documentaries is a world of city symphonies, married couples, American families, police, paras and sailors. But this search for universality takes its toll. First there is the traditional cost. Documentaries exist in free fall between the general and the particular. Every last Inuit, industrial worker, deepsea fisherman, etc, must stand on the screen both for themselves and for a class of persons of their type. The actual image is of one particular person; the rhetoric of the title and the genre is of a tribe. So parts come to stand for wholes and this synecdoche is needed if a claim of social relevance (which is essential to justify driving the Inuit, etc, crazy during the filming) is to be sustained. *Middletown* piles synecdoche on synecdoche. Not only do the individuals in the six segments stand for those classes of individuals, but Middletown itself stands for America—the universal human co-ordinates' co-ordinate not because of what is filmed but because of the context in which such filming is viewed. The actual films take second place to the sustaining rhetoric, the con-

text created by the public television channel, its documentary slot and, above all, a title which establishes for the viewer exactly what sort of work is intended. (Films are never called 'Six days in the



Community of Praise: Fundamentalists.

life of Mr and Mrs Bloggs of Acacia Avenue' or 'Events observed during a facilities visit to a military establishment by me and my crew when we happened to have the camera loaded'.)

But *Middletown* adds to this normal cost by a second specific problem. Calling a series of documentaries after a classic sociological study makes explicit the usually hidden sociological legitimations of such films and invites comparison between the screen and the book. In this case, without prejudice to the value and limitations of positivist sociology, the comparison is disastrous to the films. In short, the books tell us much we didn't know and the films tell us little. We might feel sorry for some of the protagonists, not least because they were foolish enough to allow the cameras in, but such empathy cannot justify the exercise, never mind the title. Indeed the title, so necessary one supposes for getting the series made, actually works to reduce

the validity of the better episodes.

Leacock's *Middletown* whale, for instance, *Community of Praise*, deals with the practice of Fundamentalist Christianity. Beyond the major danger of the Direct Cinema approach, which is that filming the surface of things reveals the surface of things, Leacock has another problem. His episode must stand for religion in Middletown, yet his family is utterly atypical—speaking with tongues, falling over and the like. Were this then Leacock's own essay one would simply be worried about the stereotyping of this family. That the mother had a big city background and a degree, facts which would work against this stereotyping, I learned from Leacock himself, not his film. And the elements of the film that are surprising, non-stereotypical, look like nothing so much as sins of omission. For the family says nothing of racism, anti-semitism or the rest of the bigotry associated with this faith. But then the real wonder of the film is that Leacock liked his subjects. He proceeds throughout with the air of a man who can now say 'some of my best friends are Holy Rollers.'

Compare this with the Lynds' account of religion in Middletown. Fundamentalism of the sort Leacock concentrates on takes its place amid the 34 organised religious groups the Lynds discovered. Their approach to the question of religious practice also related attendance and belief to class. They found two classes in Middletown—the business class and the working class—and of the 43 per cent of the inhabitants who worked, seven out of ten were employed workers and three belonged to the business class. This is where the Lynds start, with what they call 'the long arm of the job'. I am not arguing that it was Davis' task to update such statistics, much less systematically include them in the films. But in any supposed portrait of a modern community, is it too much to ask that some sense of the world of work and business be given?

As is usual on American television, *Middletown* has almost nothing of work in it. The episode ostensibly devoted to

trade, *A Family Business*, was about an ex-Marine officer and his umpteen kids tottering on bankruptcy running a pizza parlour. At the climax one son says that Dad can close up the place without worry because, hell, they can all find jobs. Whether they can or not in a severely depressed Midwest is simply never dealt with by the series. Employment and unemployment are not mentioned either in the episode devoted to the town's politics, which are observed during the drama of a mayoral election campaign concentrating almost entirely, in the American fashion, on personalities.

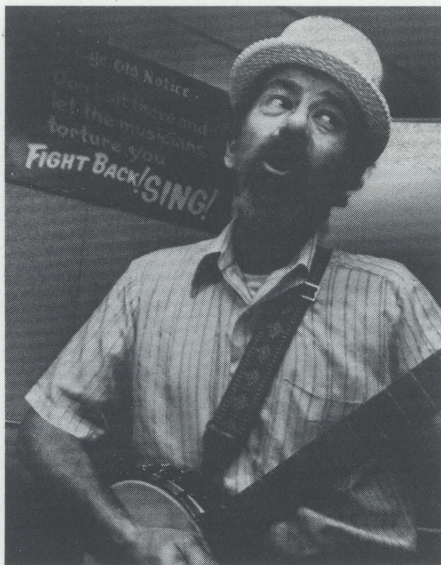
As with work, so with race. Apart from the DeMott/Kreines film *Seventeen*, there is no mention of race. In *Community of Praise*, the Fundamentalists, all white, are led in prayer by a black preacher—the sociology of which screams to be explained. It isn't. *The Big Game* is a video effort of which about a third is nothing more than coverage of the high school basketball game with voice-over commentary taken from the local radio station (there's purity for you). Blacks figure, for the only time in the publicly seen episodes, but despite the use of interviews their situation is not examined.

The result of this eclecticism is that one can learn more of Middletown from the Lynds' footnotes (what a school dance cost, how you had to take the girl to that dance in a taxi if you didn't have a family car, whose kitchen lights were on at 6 am of a winter's morning) than one can from the whole transmitted series. Davis has failed to find ways of dealing with such Lynd topics as 'Food, Clothing and Housework'. Instead, we have the sections of the book that can be turned into dramatic movies, the rites of passage—marriage, the big sports game, impending bankruptcy, graduation, interracial sex, faith healers—the 'sexy' bits. Thus it is that documentaries 'look at the world and run away from its social meaning.'

Middletown, as the Lynds were at pains to hide but as is now well known, is Muncie, Indiana. Thanks in part to them, this is now a town so average that a large sign on an approach highway proclaims it as 'Modeltown, America'. Its big attraction is that its demographic typicality is embodied by a group of folk who are friendly to strangers, real friendly. They

will apparently entertain sociologists or camera crews at the drop of a hat. But Middletown was subjected to this latest invasion of investigators without those investigators in any way co-ordinating their efforts. At no time were the filmmakers called together to discuss the implications of making such a series under such a title; they were not even apparently required to read *Middletown* itself.

The result is a mishmash of styles and techniques which speak well to the current state of Direct Cinema. Leacock and his assistant Marisa Silver moved into Muncie and made their film there. The film contains acknowledgments of the camera's presence, some interview material, but is largely in the now classic Direct Cinema style. DeMott and Kreines, normally based in Alabama, moved in too. They are, after the fashion of top students, even more rigorous than the master. They work, turn and turn about, solo. *Seventeen*, the unseen episode, is by happy accident then the purest expression of Direct Cinema (containing acknowledgments of and a few



A Family Business: pizza parlour.

questions from the camera), and the only attempt in the series to deal with the working class, white and black. The other four programmes were the usual mix of interventionism and self-effacement.

Their fly on the wall conceits begin to look odder and odder to me. Two people sit in the front of a large American car, both in profile, and talk to each other. I am now so conscious of the camera that all I can think of is Eliot's query, 'Who is the third who walks beside you?' (never mind the fourth sitting in the back with the tape recorder). These episodes all had big crews—seven production assistants on the *The Big Game*, a grip, a gaffer, a best boy and four production assistants on *A Family Business*. One is reminded of Paul Rotha's thought: 'It is strange that these many and varied efforts to realise and solve the problem of people in documentary are marked by an increasing, and perhaps dangerous, return to theatricalism. Having been freed from the banalities of the story film, having been developed along fresh and stimulating lines, documentary may now present the sad if faintly ironic spectacle of returning, in spirit if not in material, to the studio.'

For the Direct Cinema episodes of *Middletown*, the pretension of the title remains a key problem, and the difficulties of penetrating beyond the surface still loom large. For the four 'Vérité' segments, the pretence of sociology seeks to mask a mass of haphazardly researched, unimaginatively chosen topics. Behind the appearance of objectivity lies, instead of the rigour of yesterday's Direct Cinema (warts and all), a mélange of styles and techniques each more elaborate, complex and above all phoney than the last. The mundane, in these circumstances, will remain an undiscovered country.

Davis, an alumnus of American television's most distinguished documentary series, *CBS Reports*, and maker of the anti-war film *Hearts and Minds* (1974), might seem in *Middletown* to be following in the footsteps of those documentarists who were influenced by the Mass Observation movement of the 30s. But it turns out that only surrealists really want to know what every last person is doing at 6 pm of a Saturday night. The rest of us, Davis included, are more interested in the extraordinary, or we are attracted to unexceptional folk only in exceptional circumstances—the moments of crisis. Then and only then do ordinary lives become sufficiently theatrical to sustain a documentary film.

Police: This modern copper wouldn't help any children across the street because he knows they are nothing but momentarily quiescent rioters.

Roger Graef, who comes from the theatre, has seldom been seduced into attempting to illuminate the ordinary. Instead, over the past decade he has concentrated in a series of remarkable films on the portrayal of power. This is not to say that he treats power as if it were deviancy—as his colleagues for the most part tend to treat poverty and misfortune. Rather, he

has substituted the frisson to be had from watching normal but usually secret behaviour for the frisson of watching deviance. For this subject, the observation of the hidden workings of power within institutions, Graef uses the purest of Direct Cinema modes. In the hands of his long-time collaborator Charles Stewart, the style of these films is minimally

interventionist. Graef, however complex the topic, still eschews interviews and narration. Interested in institutions, he avoids the private domain almost entirely and also avoids thereby the pitfalls of the dominant 'victim' documentary.

To deal with the powerful rather than the powerless in society, Graef has elaborated the rules of Direct Cinema. His

films crucially depend on a proper, not to say handsome, level of support from the broadcasters for whom he normally works. Time must be allocated for research and filming way beyond the 'Vérité' norms they are used to, even beyond the larger expectations of Direct Cinema. This means that Graef's claim to be making a 'film of record' can be better sustained. But a 'film of record' depends on more than the largesse of producers. It can be attempted only if very limited canvases are tackled. Graef delineates these by observing, within the complexities of the organisation, just one small singular activity, one issue. In the nature of the case he sometimes is not in at the very beginning, but he always has enough time to wait for a resolution. The crew ask to be informed of all developments relevant to the one issue agreed upon as the film's subject. They bind themselves to secrecy until the film is made. The subjects, the powerful, are allowed to view a fine cut for the purpose of checking accuracy only; not for Graef the release form whereby the documentary film-maker all too often joins the rest of society in exploiting the victim.

The United States Senate, the British Parliament (at least peripherally), EEC headquarters, British Steel, Hamersmith Borough Council, Occidental Oil and the Communist Party of Great Britain are among the doors that Graef had managed to get behind. And last year he turned to the police.

Like the subjects of the *Middletown* series, watching the police at work has become something of a Direct Cinema cliché, from Wiseman's *Law and Order* (1969) to the Raymonds' *The Police Tapes* (1977). But *Police* achieved exactly what the publicly seen episodes of *Middletown* missed: it illuminated. It did not do this, of course, by presenting an abstracted and sociological picture of its subject replete with statistics. It was more like that aspect of the Lynds' work which best reflects the power and accuracy of their observation. *Police* was a series of Lynd-style footnotes elevated into an informing and well structured set of texts. In this it did perhaps all that documentary can do—it fleshed out with vibrant images the bare bones of a social situation which its audience understands from lots of other sources.

What justifies dealing with this topic again is the sense, perfectly caught by the series, of the dilemma of the modern British policeman. On the one hand he has the traditional self-image of public guardian, the man who helps little children across the street; and on the other he has a more modern vision of himself as a besieged defender of law and order facing a rising sea of barbarism. This modern copper wouldn't help any children across the street because he knows they are nothing but momentarily quiescent rioters. It was perhaps this schizophrenia that allowed the senior officers of the Thames Valley force to agree to Graef's system of film-making and to permit transmission of the results.

A drunken phone call threatening a dog evoked from the police a *Hill Street*

Blues response, flak-jackets and sharpshooters in goodly number—even, to lead this embattled team, a quiet-spoken, upper-class military chap. That the police have such tactical units comes as little surprise, but that one is stationed about ten miles from the quiet Oxfordshire field where I used to live astonished me. It clearly was still a bit of a novelty to the two senior policemen involved in the operation. As they walked into the range of their own guns to talk the supposed offender out of his lair they were wryly commenting on the dangers of friendly fire.

The strain between the old and the new in this sequence was expressed in glances, the looks the ordinary policemen gave each other when confronting the tactics of the Clausewitz now recruited to their ranks. Catching such minutiae is what makes the footnotes vivid; it is what justifies the film as a whole. And thanks, not least, to the mismatch between the lens' angle of view and the human angle of vision, it is by no means an automatic function of the equipment to capture this sort of detail. One needs, like Stewart



Police: Direct Cinema in action.

and the second cameraperson Diane Tammes, to have independent eyes. (Following the advice of the tactical group, by the way, cost the police £40 for breaking the drunk's door down without a reason.)

By dint of these footnotes, a coherent picture of the society in all its richness emerged. I can think of few texts on the realities of class in Britain, for instance, better than the episode wherein the CID lie in wait for a band of expected thieves at the Duchess of Marlborough's country drum. One copper, a Cockney lad, took most of the film to get to the correct form of address. His first try, 'Lady Marlborough', was curtly corrected to 'It's the Duchess of Marlborough actually.' Thereafter he tried the odd 'Madam' and even 'Er, er, Duchess' before he finally achieved 'Your Grace'. (The thieves did not show.)

If this was the attractive and somewhat charmingly comic face of the old-style

police, the social significance of the series was the exposure of their up-to-date aspect. *A Complaint of Rape* had three officers interrogating a woman who claimed to have been raped. The style of questioning—hostile, overbearing and insensitive to a painful degree—caused a public outcry. In this it was no little aided by the fact that Mrs Thatcher was already in full voice about a series of judicial decisions letting rapists off with scandalously light sentences. The impact of the film was immediate. Officers were demoted and reforms promised, including a special rape unit staffed by women police.

The underlying assumption of most social documentaries is exactly that they shall act as agents of reform. That they almost never do is conveniently forgotten when justifications for invasion of privacy, voyeurism or general disturbance are trotted forth by documentarists. An external factor, as in this case with the accident of all those rape stories in the papers, is needed to make the film 'work' in this way—and even then it is a rare occurrence. Whether film should have this power or not is another matter, for who mandates the film-makers as reformers, who pays them and who benefits from their efforts? *A Complaint of Rape*, though, seems to lie among the most clear-cut of such cases. The BBC and the rulers of the Thames Valley Police, for whatever internal reasons of their own, clearly licensed Graef to proceed.

The public discussion that followed transmission was, needless to say, more interested in the usual and largely irrelevant agenda of documentary 'problems'—the 'problem' of 'performance' commanding much attention from editorial and feature writers. 'The "cinéma vérité" approach used here invites the assumption that we are viewing the whole truth; but this is not necessarily the case at all. It is dangerous to extrapolate and generalise from situations which must be influenced, to some degree, by the presence of a television camera and crew.' It is obviously more interesting to deal with the notion that the police were acting up for the camera than it is to tackle the vexed relationships of pro-filmic to filmic event and the all-important impact of the editing process.

The suggestion here is that the police were modifying their behaviour for the camera, but it is just as likely that they were doing no such thing. Indeed the most obnoxious of the three detectives involved kept dismissing the woman's fears of reprisal from her attackers with the phrase, 'This is not *Starsky and Hutch*.' I thought his manner, and the manner of all the 'modern' officers in the series, was very much *Starsky and Hutch*. I got the impression that their role models were media-generated and that, in effect, they probably behaved like the heroes of a TV cop show all the time. Actually having a camera present for once made little difference, beyond revealing this disturbing characteristic to the rest of us. And although this personal police style clearly does not apply to

other situations, in these too the question of the camera encouraging performance is almost always irrelevant. When Leacock claims that, with current equipment, the event can be more important than the filming, he speaks, for most of the situations film-makers of his type are interested in, nothing but the truth.

For most people, Graef's films are quite simply evidence. For all those that thought the evidence suspect, there were many, equally curious, seeking to determine the truth of the woman's tale on the basis of the screen alone. This sort of response is not uncommon with Graef movies. It is one of the major factors that

mark him off from other documentarists, for the commonest reaction to vexatious material is always to claim that the film-makers fixed it in some way. With Graef films that never happens and the rows, which are not infrequent, turn as in this case on the substance of the events filmed rather than on the filming.

...Direct Cinema has been sailing away on whaling expeditions without proper charts, seeking quite the wrong sort of beasts.

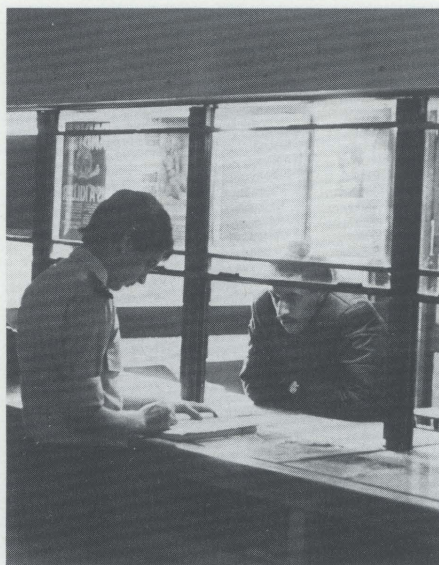
The banned *Middletown* episode *Seventeen* was not so lucky and therefore more typical. The Xerox Corporation did not like *Seventeen* and neither did the executives of the American public television system. The usual charges of reconstruction, intervention and incitement were hauled out. But the film-makers, lacking Graef's elaborate work code and dealing with a broad topic which took them to a variety of people and settings, could not easily rebut such accusations. The row also encompassed the language used in the film. Working-class kids use foul language and drugs, don't study much, smoke grass and talk about sex. Apparently, Xerox would have us believe, they only behave like this in the presence of a camera when encouraged to do so by passing film-makers. Or, if that is a little far-fetched, an alternative scenario has the film-makers themselves seeking out that small minority of kids who do these things.

Given the Alice in Wonderland quality of the 'sociology' of the transmitted episodes, this sudden demand for accurate representation, this appeal to the court of the typical, is a little astonishing. The actual problem with *Seventeen* is not its language (except for one sequence which could easily have been 'cleaned up' for transmission). Bad language was heard on some other shows and is anyway not unknown on public television in America. What got up Xerox's nose was the fact that, during the course of the filming, the chief protagonist, a white girl, started going out with a black boy. Interracial dating was the real if somewhat obscured issue. The result was a public debate notable chiefly for its hypocrisy.

The irony is that, alone of the *Middletown* series, *Seventeen* had, to quote Grierson, 'documentary value'. It shared with *Police* the power to inform. The potential for such interracial relationships in a Midwestern high school, their effect (a cross was burned on the girl's lawn but the whole family took that, to my surprise, more or less in their stride), the attitude of the boys and girls involved—all this was new, a Lynd footnote of the best type. The film filled in this broad theme with illuminating detail. That teenagers in Muncie hold beer parties of utter raucousness under the supervision of their parents; that parents will turn out to witness a threatened gang fight, involving their

own kids, in the spirit of attending a sports event. And amidst the bad language, I learned much talk that was new. 'Crank that jammer', for instance, apparently means 'turn up the radio'—this during a sequence in which a boy mourns the death of his best friend in a car accident by asking a local station to play 'Against the Wind'.

Seventeen and *Police* are examples of



Police: station officer.

Direct Cinema's best. By all the requirements of the Griersonian tradition they are fine pieces of work. Their limitations and difficulties are, then, the limitations and difficulties of the entire tradition. Take 'victims'.

In *Police*, Graef's usual focus on the powerful involves 'victims' as the police 'props', as it were. The rape victim, her identity carefully concealed by a crew who never filmed her face, was discovered no doubt at some expense by the *News of the World*. According to that paper's account the woman was upset by the cameras, although the language she uses in the newspaper interview seemed to me sufficiently at odds with her performance in the film to call into question the trustworthiness of this testimony. Nevertheless, she was there to be found by the Sunday press. The point remains that although she was clearly a victim of the police she was also, in some sense, a

victim of the crew. In this case, however, the justification is quite straightforward. Balancing the treatment she was seen receiving at the hands of representatives of the state is the public's right to know. This right often seems too close to voyeurism to mean very much, but here, as subsequent events demonstrated, it had real substance. The other 'victims' in the series cannot be so easily accounted for—the parade of drunks, pop festival attenders, petty criminals are all part of contemporary documentary's obsession with the halt and the lame. That *Police* was a hit television series, one of the rare examples of documentary escaping from the ghetto of small audiences, exacerbates the problem.

Seventeen raises the same issue. I feel the value of the film is self-evident, yet its topic is contentious and its transmission could have haunted the participants. Kreines and DeMott had thought about this and were at ease because the girls they featured had all, by the time of the planned transmission, moved away. Of course the row wrecked this strategy. It had the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating in advance of transmission exactly the furore that was supposed to be the danger if the show went out. The local station was especially effective in this, calling in children for cross-examination, summoning Muncie's great and good to private screenings, and generally making sure that all concerned in *Seventeen* would regret their part in the venture.

All *Middletown*, to one degree or another, dealt with victims. The pizza parlour owner is now publicly inscribed as a failure. The film will circulate, like that other study of Midwestern entrepreneurial incompetence *Salesman* (Maysles, 1969), in perpetuity. The divorced pair who remarry in another episode also have a wedding album they might live to regret. If there is any public right to know here I find it hard to detect. And the acute limitations of that right should not be forgotten. While the Maysles' Bible salesman film is freely available for screenings, the two films they made about powerful figures, *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965) and the portrait of Joe Levine (*Showman*, 1962), are not to be seen, for both have been padlocked in the Maysles' vaults by high-powered lawyers acting for the subjects concerned. In fact, *Seventeen* is the only one of the

Middletown films for which a public right to know case can be made. It is all too typical that the banning hinged on quite other and irrelevant issues, issues which could have better been used to prevent the transmission of some of the other episodes.

The Direct Cinema style has made the problem of documentary subjects' rights acute, exactly because it allows the filmmaker far greater opportunity to lurk and pry. Let Harold Williamson, writing in the *Listener*, stand for the majority of film-makers. Williamson has the dubious honour of contributing to the early *Man Alive* series which, you might recall, came closer than any other to importing the standards of the yellow press to British television on a regular basis. He had the idea of approaching some of his victims from this period again. 'For a long time after the programme went out—sometimes for years afterwards—they had been got at by neighbours, or family, or colleagues who, for one reason or another, were angered, outraged, ashamed, envious or offended by their television broadcast to the nation.' He tells of fear, loss of jobs, forced house moves. On the plus side, he has a rector who turned his crypt into a pub and was visited by the Queen Mother!

Some people agreed to work with him again. 'They all needed coaxing to tell their stories but, in the end, they decided to trust television again because, all of them said, someone might benefit from their experiences.' This 'someone' is to my mind as mythic a beast as the chimera. I regret that the silver-tongued Williamson and all his equally glib colleagues are able to coax anyone before their cameras.

If the accepted standards of documentary morality urgently need to be examined, the same is no longer true of the other major problem. Direct Cinema promised to deliver observation, pure and simple. But the need creatively to manipulate reality for the purposes of storytelling did not go away—and that at least is now better understood. The third decade of Direct Cinema finds the debate about ethics as attenuated as ever, but the issue of objectivity is at last being seriously addressed.

It is a pity that currently fashionable theoretical approaches to the documentary, while quite properly insisting on the ideological complicity of the idea of observation, nevertheless fail to take account of the social context in which these films and tapes exist. This is a sort of backlash. It is being argued that because no film can be made without mediation, and all films claiming to be observational are inherently dishonest, we can learn nothing from them. Current criticism would thus deny even the force of a Lynd-like footnote to Direct Cinema. But there is a jump in logic here. For to argue that, say, the effects of *Police* are an accident since the films' obsession with surface leaves no possibility of analysis, is to deny the audience the chance for such analysis. It is to claim, as a species of radical naif, that people

watching *Police* know nothing of policemen and can therefore reach no conclusions about the films.

The limits of this can be seen in the response to a recent fashionable documentary. People by and large know little of Spanish Harlem and are therefore prepared to find in Chris Menges' *East 103rd Street* a depth of analysis which is denied Graef. Since *East 103rd Street* is but another beautifully shot and exquisitely edited beached Direct Cinema/'Vérité' whale, in which the stereotypical victim-subjects obey such fundamental dramatic conventions as not speaking their own language and magicking soft drugs into hard, I find it hard to see it as a more responsive and revealing text. What is revealed, however, in the critical acceptance of *East 103rd Street* is the importance of building into our understanding of how documentary works some assessment of the viewers' own knowledge or ignorance of the topic at hand.

The cost then for our greater understanding of the limits of objectivity is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the camera's



Police: traffic duty.

ability to record. It is clear that the Direct Cinema practitioners have brought this upon themselves. They have not distanced themselves from the previous Griersonian rhetoric. Indeed they have claimed to be the only true believers in the great tradition. They are not careful enough about the continuing effect of their work on the people they use as subjects. They are unprepared to address the paradox of their own reputations as film-makers (or artists) against the supposed transparency of their fly on the wall techniques. They will not acknowledge the essential work of fictionalisation that goes on in the cutting room. The result is that Direct Cinema has been sailing away on whaling expeditions without proper charts, seeking quite the wrong sort of beasts. The crisis of documentary is therefore deepening. The danger is that film's ability to tell us anything of the world will be lost in the wreck of the Direct Cinema idea. ■

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WALES4CYMRU

Sianel Pedwar Cymru

The Welsh Perspective

The announcement by Gwynfor Evans, MP and President of Plaid Cymru, in May 1980, that he would fast until death unless a separate Welsh television channel were established, was met by the English with incredulity bordering on disdain. How could a man lay down his life for *television*? Reliant, as one was, on the English press for information, we could not possibly understand the depth of feeling in the 'Principality' on this issue.

The struggle for a Welsh channel had been active for ten years, since 1970, when the Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) formed a broadcasting group to devise strategies and conduct a campaign. In its first year, the group organised marches, rallies and the ritual burning of TV licences. In 1971, the first 'direct' action occurred—damage to a Granada TV studio in Manchester. Over the next four years, the campaign steadily gathered momentum—not, as the sensationalist press suggested, among a Celtic lunatic fringe, but in such quarters as the Church, local and county councils, and academia. In 1974, hopes mounted with the publication of the Crawford Committee's Report on Broadcasting, which proposed the setting up of a Welsh fourth channel, offering 25 hours of Welsh-language programmes per week, under the joint control of Harlech Television and the BBC. The Report proposed appointing another working party to examine the technical feasibility of such a scheme. This group, the Siberry Committee, took a year to publish its Report, which concluded, simply, that a separate channel *was* technically possible, but offered no timetable for implementation.

In 1976 the WLS stepped up action, urging the Welsh people once again to withhold their licence payments. On 19 February 1976, the Government published its White Paper on Public Expenditure, in which there was no mention of the Welsh Fourth Channel. On that day, in reaction, frustrated members of the WLS disrupted proceedings in the House

Stephen Bayly

of Lords. In the autumn, the WLS proclaimed a renewed campaign of direct action, and in February 1977 the BBC transmitter at Blaenplwyf, near Aberystwyth, was damaged. Unlike previous such incidents, the WLS itself took responsibility and was charged with conspiracy.

In March 1977, the Annan Report was published. It proposed the setting up of a British fourth channel (Open Broadcasting Authority), and some provision for a Welsh fourth channel within that structure. More than a year elapsed before the Labour Government reacted to Annan's suggestions. The then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, himself chaired the Broadcasting Committee, which included Messrs Benn, Hattersley and Rodgers. The official White Paper on Broadcasting was issued on 26 July 1978, reiterating the government's commitment to the idea of a Welsh channel.

Meanwhile, the Blaenplwyf conspiracy trial was held, with the Chairman and ex-Chairman of the WLS in the dock. The Society had wanted to use the trial as a showcase, and, indeed, the WLS cause was effectively put across and widely covered in the press. The outcome was inevitable. The Chairman and ex-Chairman were convicted and imprisoned, and hunger strikes and protest marches followed.

In 1979 Devolution became the main issue concerning the Welsh people, and energies were diverted, especially in Plaid Cymru, away from the television campaign. To make matters worse, in May the Labour Government fell, and the Tories marched in with a 44-seat majority. The Welsh-language campaigners despaired—if a Labour government seemed to be hard of hearing at the mention of the Welsh language, a Tory government would be stone deaf (although both parties had pledged a Welsh fourth channel in their manifestos).

To everyone's surprise, in the Queen's Speech of 15 May the new Government committed itself firmly to both a fourth channel in England and a Welsh broadcasting service in Wales—the former to be an ITV2, with advertising, and the latter to be partly financed by ITV. To the Welsh Language Society success seemed imminent. There was one fly in the ointment, however, in the guise of Harlech Television. HTV were angling for an ITV2 in Wales controlled by them, through which they would broadcast their Welsh-language material. The Government bowed to HTV's pressure, and announced that the Welsh-language programmes would be shared between BBC2 and ITV2.

The Welsh were stunned. After ten years of campaigning and six years of promises—the Crawford Report, the Siberry Report, the Annan Report, the White Paper—a separate Welsh-controlled channel was not to be. The Conservatives had broken their election pledge. Direct action increased. Transmitters were again attacked. TV licences were burned. The perpetrators of these illegal actions were not a young radical clique—they were the respected middle-aged professionals, academics and churchmen who had hitherto remained in the background of the struggle, and they could not be ignored and would not be fobbed off.

Finally, in May 1980, Gwynfor Evans delivered a *tour de force*. His ultimatum was simple: unless by 6 October the Government gave Wales its own Channel, with a minimum of 25 hours per week airtime, he would go on hunger strike. 'Byw neu Farw' ('Life or Death'). The struggle had taken on a desperate dimension; Wales was alive with protest. More transmitters were damaged, Conservative offices were occupied, roads blocked, TV masts climbed, rallies held, switchboards jammed, and government officials harassed. The Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, who dared to visit Wales, was menaced by hostile crowds on several occasions.

But it was the voice of reason that won the day. Goronwy Daniel, Principal of Aberystwyth University, Gwilym Williams, the Archbishop of Wales, and Lord Cledwyn, former Secretary of State for Wales, went up to London to argue quietly that the logical consequence of Government intransigence would be insurrection in the principality. The Government made a U-turn, and Gwynfor Evans didn't miss a meal. (It must be said, though, that many WLS members were not so fortunate, and suffered years of deprivation serving out their prison sentences.) Six months later, on St David's Day, the members of the new Welsh Fourth Channel Authority were appointed: Sir Goronwy Daniel was Chairman; Owen Edwards, then head of BBC Wales, Director. After eleven years of struggle, the Welsh Channel had become reality.

The new channel was christened Sianel Pedwar Cymru, meaning Channel Four Wales—S4C, for short. (Its clever logo, WALES4CYMRU, offended the WLS because the English name preceded the Welsh.) Transmission began on 1 November 1982, one day before Channel 4 UK.

S4C transmits 22 hours of Welsh-language broadcasts every week, mostly in primetime. The remaining 53 hours of broadcasting consist of rescheduled C4-UK programmes. There are 2,700,000 people living in Wales. 600,000, or 22 per cent, are Welsh speakers. Discounting children under four, people without television and people not reached by S4C transmitters, the potential audience of the Channel is 400,000. The Channel's budget for the current year is £24.6m, or £61 for every potential viewer, not including the BBC contribution. No other minority language in Europe has so much airtime or investment per capita. The Bretons and the Gaelic-Irish at the recent Celtic Film Festival, where S4C showcased its programmes, appeared green with envy, and returned to their own countries inspired to achieve more TV exposure.

Of the 22 hours of programming per week, 10 (46 per cent) are provided by BBC Wales, and are financed by the television licence fee, 7¼ (35 per cent) by HTV, 55 minutes (4 per cent) by S4C themselves (5-minute language teaching spots and a 5-minute farming bulletin), and the remainder, 3½ hours (15 per cent), by independents. However, in examining one week chosen at random, 2-8 July 1983, I discovered that there were only 19 hours and 48 minutes of programmes, broken down as follows:

BBC	8 hrs, 18 mins	42%
HTV	8 hrs, 10 mins	41%
Independents	1 hr, 55 mins	10%
Foreign	30 mins	2%
S4C	55 mins	5%

The shorter duration of programming is typical of summer schedules. Presumably the shortfall in hours, and the imbalance in sources, are redressed during the other seasons.

Of the £24.6m budget, £15m goes to HTV, £7m to independent companies,

£600,000 is a contingency budget and £2m is used to operate the Channel. This last figure is remarkably small when you consider that it covers administration, technical services, studio presentation, at least one half-hour of studio-originated programming, publicity, the publication of the excellent weekly programme magazine *Spec* (distributed free with the *TV Times*) and all overheads.

In terms of programme costs, HTV receive £34,500 per hour of programme (to be increased to £35,790 when their new studios at Culverhouse Cross, Cardiff, become operational). The independents receive £34,000 per hour on average. However, a significant portion of the independents' allocation goes into the high quality animation productions of *Superted* and *Wil Cwac Cwac*, which are very expensive to produce, but, in turn, are the highest money-spinners in terms of international sales. Thus the money available to producers of other types of programmes is considerably lower than the average.

No other minority language in Europe has so much air time or investment per capita

An example of one week's Welsh programmes is given below. The week chosen falls in the Summer Season and cannot be said to be typical of S4C schedules at other times of the year.

HOURS BY PROGRAMME CATEGORY S4C
Week of 2-8 July 1983

News	3 hrs, 8 mins	16%
Current affairs, documentaries, arts	3 hrs, 35 mins	19%
Religion	30 mins	2%
Adult education	50 mins	4%
Plays, drama, TV movies	1 hr	5%
Feature films	—	—
Children's programmes	4 hrs, 20 mins	22%
Entertainment, music	5 hrs, 35 mins	28%
Sport	50 mins	4%

Sianel Pedwar Cymru wishes to reach the widest possible audience among the Welsh-speaking population, thus it places a heavy emphasis on light entertainment. Compare our sample week's light entertainment and music output, 28

per cent of total programmes, with the BBC and ITV averages in 1981-82, respectively 9 and 14 per cent.

The 3 hours per week of news is provided by BBC Wales. S4C had opted not to create a Welsh ITN, a concept wholeheartedly espoused by some Welsh pundits, on the grounds that the news should be from a Welsh perspective. Instead they invited ITV and the BBC to tender for the franchise. ITV dropped out of the race, and the plum fell to the BBC by default. The 'Welsh perspective' (begging the question 'Which Welsh perspective?') has been catered for in HTV's thrice weekly 25-minute current affairs programme, *Y Byd ar Bedwar* (*The World on Four*), an analysis of world events. To give an example, *Y Byd* recently devoted one hour to the West German election.

The paucity of drama on S4C is one of the Channel's obvious shortcomings. The single hour of drama in the week studied consisted of two half-hour situation-comedy series, both produced by HTV. More drama is included in the winter schedules, perhaps 10-12 per cent of the weekly timetable. But this does not come near to the percentage of broadcasting devoted to drama and films by either the BBC (27 per cent in 1981-82) or ITV (29¼ per cent in 1981-82). The lack of films and drama is the most widely voiced complaint this author has encountered among S4C viewers.

The problem is recognised by S4C and is simply one of money. Fiction is nigh-on impossible to produce at £34,000 per hour. Commissioning Editor Emlyn Davies urges producers to devise ideas for 'cheap' drama productions. On the other hand, Euryng Ogwen Williams, Deputy Director and Programme Editor, insists that independent producers work strictly to union agreements, and do not cut corners on labour costs. The independent producer is caught in the middle. Fortunately for S4C, the C4-UK programmes which come down the line from London can be selected and rescheduled as needed, and there is a heavy weighting towards comedy, drama and films, bracketing the Welsh-language programmes in the evening. Thus the combined English and Welsh viewing-evening contains a quantity of those types of programme comparable to the ITV and BBC percentages.

The heavy emphasis on children's programmes (22 per cent during the week in question, as opposed to the ITV and BBC norm of 10 per cent) seems appropriate. It used to be said that one was only truly Welsh until the age of 11, because, while primary schools in Welsh areas were teaching exclusively in Welsh, secondary schools reverted to English. That situation has changed considerably in the last fifteen years, with the number of secondary schools teaching through the medium of Welsh on the increase. Language must be regenerated through youth. The availability of children's programmes in Welsh means that children will not be driven to English out of a simple desire to watch the telly.

Apart from *Y Byd ar Bedwar*, the documentary, arts and current-affairs

programmes in our sample week were not inspiring. It happened to be the week of the Llangollen Eisteddfod, and three programmes, totalling one hour and 50 minutes, were devoted to this event. It's impossible for an outsider to appreciate the significance of these Welsh culture feasts. Try to imagine the Royal Opera, the Poet Laureate, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus rolled into one institution, and you will have an approximate idea. S4C is also devoting three hours per day—27 hours in total—to the National Eisteddfod at Ynys Mon (Anglesey) in August. The other programmes in this sector consisted of a 5-minute farming bulletin and a documentary about Welsh cookery—part of a series in which Jack Bellamy travels about the country in search of old recipes and tidbits of history.

The 50 minutes of educational programmes in the sample week consist of five 5-minute spots entitled *Gair yn ei Bryd*—a refresher course for rusty Welsh speakers and for learners using simple graphics. Often concentrating on new vocabulary which one has heard in the past day's news bulletins, these spots open the evening's Welsh broadcasting and are repeated just before close-down. They are prepared by an advisory panel and produced in the S4C studio. Euryn Ogwen Williams has stated that the Channel does not consider the teaching of Welsh to be its role, that the means to do that are readily available elsewhere (there has been a massive rise in the number of Welsh learners in adult education courses since the opening of the Channel), and that the duty to the language can best be fulfilled in providing a spectrum of quality programmes in Welsh. Nevertheless, *Gair yn ei Bryd* encourages those who are struggling with Welsh to stay with S4C.

S4C programmes are served up in an appealing package. They have, I believe, got the image right. The three presenters are personable and low-key. While polished and professional, they give one a comfortable, neighbourly feeling. S4C design is excellent. The graphics are bright and clear, simple and memorable. The linkage and animation are well done. The show moves along at a lively, engaging pace. The scheduling—largely the work of S4C Head of Planning, Chris Grace—is very clever indeed. Welsh-language programmes are organised so that viewers know where to find them, and the selected C4 programmes are nicely placed to capture the highest possible audience.

Channel 4 UK's brief, from its inception, was to cater for minorities (whether racial, religious, sexual or interest groups) and to encourage innovation and experimentation in television. The Welsh Channel was not saddled with any such worthy albatross. Their entire audience is a minority, and their aim is clearly to provide popular programming to capture as large a portion of that audience as possible. Ratings take on a different meaning for S4C. They do not need to justify their existence with advertising



Wales in the Second World War: Stephen Bayly's *Joni Jones*.

revenues. However, they must face a government review at the end of three years of operation and prove that the service is working for the mass of Welsh people. Thus the programming is not strikingly controversial. Emphasis tends to be on safe aspects of traditional culture and history, by definition bucolic and folkloric, as opposed to the concerns of industrial, working-class Wales—of which there is a rich history. Otherwise, programming tends to imitate successful English or American formats, whether quiz shows or detective series.

So far, the formula seems to be working. In the first few months of S4C's existence the ratings were abnormally high—on average the Welsh programmes were seen by 50 per cent of the potential Welsh-speaking audience. The entire service was consistently capturing 9–10 per cent of the English and Welsh audience (compared with Channel 4's 4 per cent in the rest of the UK) and this seems to have levelled out to about 8 per cent, which is equivalent to the viewership for BBC2 in Wales.

However, the ratings have dipped dramatically in the summer weeks. The usual seasonal falling-off in ratings is exacerbated in Welsh broadcasting, because Welsh speakers are predominantly rural and therefore remain out of doors in fine summer weather until the sun goes down. Sunset roughly coincides with the end of Welsh-language programmes on S4C. In next year's schedules Euryn Ogwen Williams plans to have more Welsh programmes later in the evening. Meanwhile, ratings for the week of 2–8 July reached a dismaying low. On average only 12 per cent of the Welsh audience tuned in, on any one evening. It was, admittedly, the hottest week in seven years. None the less, there was

little of interest in the schedules to tempt viewers to switch on.

Thirty-three independent production companies supplied programmes to S4C in its opening year. Now there are thirty-one—a survival rate much higher than that of C4-UK independents. The majority of S4C's suppliers are based in Cardiff or around Caernarfon in the North. A few, like my company Red Rooster Films, are based in London. My partner, Linda James, is a Welsh producer previously attached to a company based in Aberystwyth, called Sgrin. It was for Sgrin that we produced *Joni Jones*, a five-part drama series about a boy growing up in North Wales during the Second World War. The series was warmly received in Wales, is to be seen on Channel 4 UK in the autumn, and is selling well throughout Europe.

Because of the success of *Joni Jones*, we find ourselves having a continuing relationship with Sianel Pedwar Cymru—one of the few English production companies to be retained on their books. The most welcome aspect of producing films for the Channel is, in my opinion, the atmosphere of trust and fairness in one's business dealings with them. There are only two commissioning editors. Their doors are invariably open to producers, writers, and directors. A frank reply is given quickly. And a 'Yes' means 'Yes'. If for external reasons it becomes a 'No', the reasons are understandable, and the producer will be fairly compensated, usually with another commission.

The worst aspect, as discussed above, is the budget. Due to overall cutbacks in the S4C budget, the allocation to independent producers has dropped from £10m last year to just under £7m this year. We

managed to muster a first-class film unit for *Joni Jones* on the basis of good will and enthusiasm, but favours wear thin. Unless S4C are able to increase the funds available for production, they risk a serious drop in the quantity, scope and quality of their drama programmes.

It is certainly odd to direct a film in a foreign language. However, as a non-Welsh-speaking director, I did not find language to be an insurmountable obstacle in directing *Joni Jones*. Ruth Carter's script was written in English, and I worked closely with the translator to insure that the Welsh version retained the nuances that she had intended. A Welsh-speaking trainee-director was on hand to check the dialogues during filming, but I found that with language out of the way, I was able to perceive subtleties in actors' performances, in gesture and voice inflection, which I never would have grasped otherwise. There is one nightmarish aspect of directing drama in Welsh—casting. There are only 110 female and 186 male actors listed in *Oriel*, the Actors Equity directory of Welsh-speaking 'actors'. Not a huge range from which to cast roles ranging between the ages of 18 and 96, especially given that not all the members listed are actors first and foremost.

To complicate matters there are two main divisions in the Welsh language—North Walian and South Walian—vastly different dialects with distinct vocabulary and usage. And there are local accents as diverse as those in England. Caernarfonese, for example, is a sort of Welsh Cockney. These accents are very difficult to imitate—actors need to reside in an area for a time to pick them up. Consequently, if one's film is set in North Wales, the casting field is cut in half. Even though the advent of S4C has

created a boom for Welsh-speaking actors, Equity have taken a strong protectionist position. As a result, talented actors and actresses are terribly overexposed in Wales, sometimes appearing on the box as many as three times in one evening, in three different roles. In *Joni Jones* we had to use puppeteers, cabaret artists, opera singers and tap-dancers—all Equity card-holders—in speaking roles. Ken Loach and Tony Garnett may choose to cast this way, but it's not every director's cup of tea.

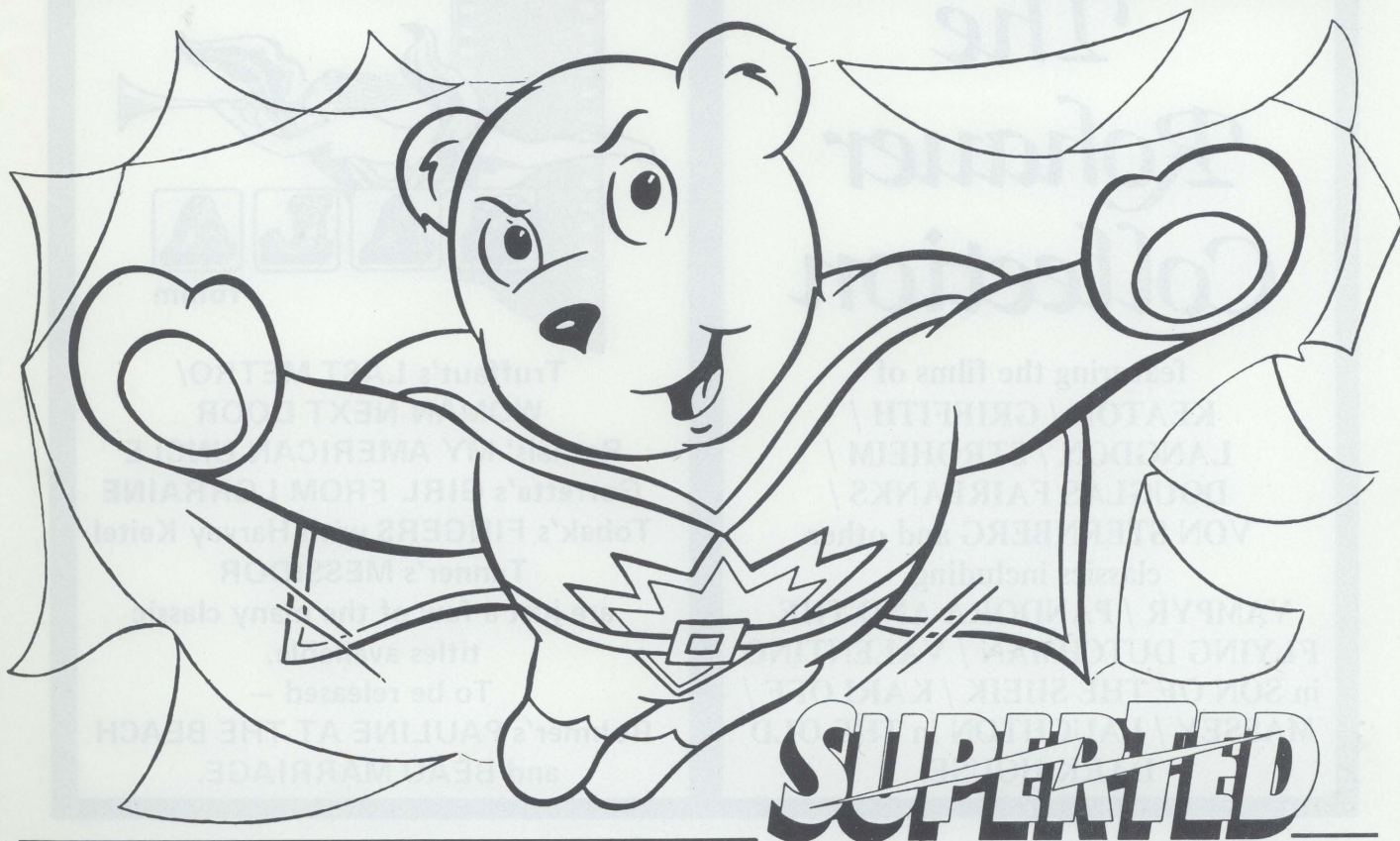
There are some peripheral aspects of S4C which cannot be ignored in evaluating the successes or failures of the venture, namely the creation of jobs and wealth in an area of Britain experiencing high unemployment. First, there are the direct jobs, in both the production and broadcasting sectors. S4C alone employs fifty-five people, in administration, technical services and presentation, etc. Siriol Animation, created by Mike Young in Cardiff to produce the popular *Superted* and *Wil Cwac Cwac* series, employs another fifty-five people. But jobs are also created indirectly. For example, the merchandising of *Superted* products alone has resulted in 50 companies manufacturing some 70 character-related products. By 1 March 1983, S4C claimed to be responsible for over 800 new jobs in Wales.

In producing *Joni Jones*, we spent approximately 30 per cent of our budget in local labour, services and consumption. One big production can significantly, if temporarily, stimulate the local economy in a depressed area. S4C has established a commercial wing, called Mentrau S4C (S4C Enterprises); starting with a £200,000 bank loan, it aims to gross £300,000 this year, rising to £1.5m per annum by 1985–86—money to be used to

bolster production. To the delight of the Channel, some of its Welsh-language productions are selling very well in the international TV marketplace. *Superted* has been sold to 40 territories. The opening up of opportunities for new creative talent is both exciting and problematic.

The advent of S4C has brought roughly 700 additional hours of Welsh programmes to the screen per year. There were, in 1981, only five respected freelance Welsh-speaking TV drama directors. Talent, in all areas of production, had to be imported. As in casting, good writers, producers and directors became quickly oversubscribed. A trainee-director programme was instituted by S4C, but was not very rigorous, and has consequently not produced startling results. Owen Edwards, Director of Sianel Pedwar, and President of the Urdd (Youth) National Eisteddfod, has emphasised writing talent as the biggest challenge for S4C. In my view, more resources, from within or without S4C's budget, must be allocated for training Welsh film-makers. As a start S4C should avail itself of the excellent training at the National Film and Television School in Beaconsfield. A Wales-wide talent hunt would surely uncover half-a-dozen potential writers or film-makers of quality per year.

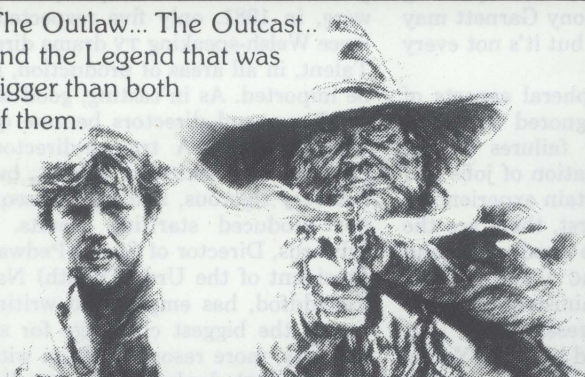
Welsh is one of the oldest living European languages. It has survived industrialisation, and is adapting well to the microchip. In North Wales, especially, it is commonly spoken in homes, in schools, in shops and in the streets. S4C is the symbol of its life. For the Welsh people Sianel Pedwar is more than 'the telly'—it is the most important medium for the development of their language in this technological mass-communications age. The consensus in Wales, as I read it, is that it was well worth the struggle. ■



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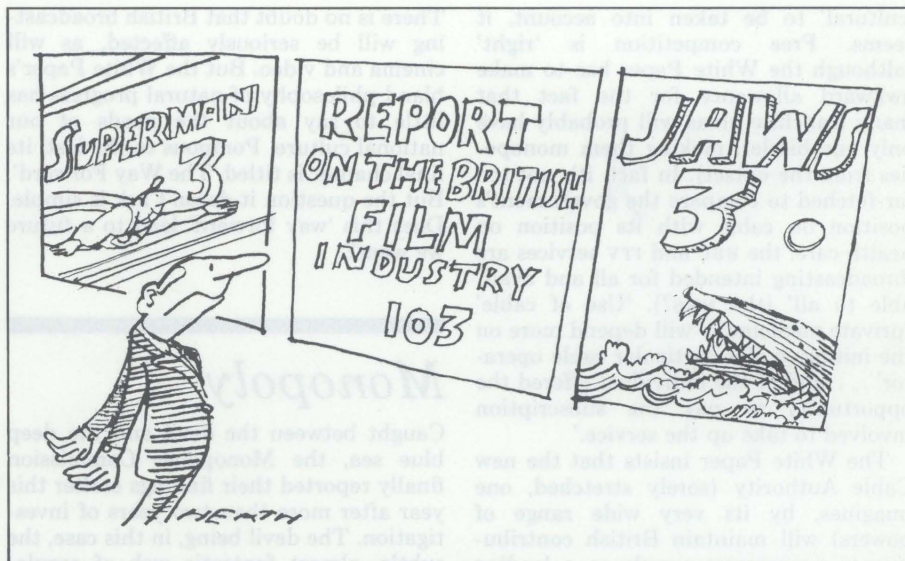
DOUBLE TAKES

Reporting

For film and television, 1983 has been the year of the Report. We have seen the Report Cut Off In Its Prime (Mr Sproat's report on the film industry); the Depressing Report Unduly Delayed (the Monopolies Commission study of distribution and exhibition); and towering above them both the Rhetorical Report, the Resolute Report, the government's White Paper on cable development, fluttering in the monetarist breeze like some standard for daring exploits to come in uncharted waters. 'As a nation,' it begins, 'our prosperity has always been built on the vision and genius of those who have been able to look into the future and shape the present accordingly.' With such a flourish on display in the second paragraph, other rhetorical lapses become less and less surprising as the pages flit by.

Twelve months ago Lord Hunt's committee reported on the prospects of cable development in the UK; nine months ago, in a Commons debate, the government outlined its essentially free market philosophy on the subject; six months ago the White Paper endorsed those intentions in detail. By the time this column appears, the first twelve pilot franchises for communities of less than 100,000 will have been granted. Within a year, the new Cable Authority will probably have granted several of the full franchises to operate cable in communities of less than half a million homes, right through (unless the operators slip up) to the year 2004.

Not that speedy development is wrong in itself. But the breezy approach of the White Paper gives cause for concern. As most people know, the government is committed to development by 'commercial and market forces'. A small Cable Authority of half-a-dozen members, appointed by the Home Secretary, will supervise franchises, inspect performances and regulate cable advertising. There will be no restrictions on 'integration'—a single company may combine all the activities of programme making, programme packaging and actual supply of the cable. ITV and ILR companies will be allowed to run cable operations, as long as these fall outside their existing TV or radio areas. All forms of financing will be permitted, from subscription (renting a particular channel or service) to pay per view (paying to see a particular programme), from spot advertising to advertiser-sponsored programming. There is no quota on the amount of British-originated programming considered desirable, though operators will be obliged to carry existing TV and radio transmissions and future satellite channels when they arrive. 'Indecency' will not be permitted, and political or religious groups can only have access to cable on certain conditions. Somewhere in the welter of options and handful of



prohibitions, it is expected that community cable and 'interactive' services (shopping, educational) will become available; but there is no statutory requirement for their supply.

The only voice raised in protest so far has been the strident denunciation by the ACTT, shouting a defensive position so loudly that the logic of the objections was never heard. After dark hints that the union would 'take action' if unregulated cable went ahead, it's hard to imagine just what action it could take. Already at the planning stage, before the pilot schemes begin operating, it seems that opposition to the new enterprise in its current form has been reduced to a rearguard action.

Perhaps the biggest initial surprise about the White Paper is the absence of fact: basic cable systems already pass 1.4 million UK homes and could easily reach a further two million. A dozen or so operators (led by Rediffusion) have operated mini-cable networks, primarily to supply existing TV services (and meeting surprising consumer resistance when they have offered a subscription-charged movie channel). But the impact or economics of these existing developments is hardly mentioned. Nor is the American example, where four major cable operators now reach 22 million homes, and where Home Box Office, with over 12 million subscribers, has effectively reached monopoly status in ten years of operation. The economic and social costs of cabling in Britain are not dealt with in any detail. As for the jobs to be generated by this enormous capital programme, the White Paper breezily predicts some 8,000 new jobs in creating or operating the networks. The effect on jobs in film and programme production is left to speculation.

All this is perfectly consistent with the government's free market intentions. As the paper puts it, 'The time has now come for a further step along the revolutionary path which was identified by the Annan Committee six years ago ...'

But why has the time come now? The White Paper sees a natural progression by which competition in home entertainment should be increased. This is not a commitment to cultural competition (Channel 4, in theory, saw to that), but to increased commercial access—access to part of our national culture which has so far been a walled garden. The objection of the BBC and ITV to cable plans was self-interested, but not unreasonable. Cable services drawing on subscription, advertising and sponsorship will inevitably outgun the funding of existing services in the long run. More dramatically, in the short term, the TV companies with their 14 per cent quota on imported material will face cable competition in the same language from American suppliers offering programmes at anything down to 10 per cent of the existing British broadcast cost per hour. British broadcasters are right to feel that the battle may be one-sided.

Further down the line, of course, the film business has reason to tremble. 'The Government does not believe that it should interfere in the commercial judgments which the industry itself should make,' is the White Paper's only comment on what may happen there. For once, it could have pointed to the American model for hope: HBO has become the single largest financing source for film production, a process that began with *The Wild Geese* and *Watership Down* in 1978. Now the vast cable operator buys literally dozens of films each year before they are made, as well as financing HBO-only productions made for the service. In Britain, however, where cinema-going is already in such steep decline, the effect is more likely to be fatal than stimulating. Even video could go under the axe: US producers, regretting that UK video companies have so regularly cheated them of their profits share, will certainly prefer to sell to the 'cleaner' client of cable once the price is right.

Within the free market model, though, even these sweeping changes are too

DOUBLE TAKES

'cultural' to be taken into account, it seems. Free competition is 'right' (although the White Paper has to make awkward allowance for the fact that many franchise areas will probably have only one bidder, making them monopolies from the outset). In fact, it's not too far-fetched to compare the government's position on cable with its position on health care: the BBC and ITV services are 'broadcasting intended for all and available to all' (the NHS?). 'Use of cable' (private medicine?) 'will depend more on the initiative of a particular cable operator'... 'and of the individual offered the opportunity to pay the subscription involved to take up the service.'

The White Paper insists that the new Cable Authority (sorely stretched, one imagines, by its very wide range of powers) will maintain British contribution to programme supply as a leading criterion in the award of franchises. All companies operating cable services must be British controlled. The facts so far tell a slightly different story. Two major British cable consortia have already been announced: the Rank/Plessey/Rediffusion/Visionhire/UIP consortium; and the Goldcrest/CBS/Columbia/Fox/HBO group. In both cases the company structure guarantees impeccable British control. But without 'product' these consortia are nothing, and in both cases the main suppliers of features and programming within the groups are major US companies. Unremarkably, perhaps, both deals were announced or leaked in Los Angeles before reaching print in London. To the largest US production groups, Britain is an outpost on the global map and, in the case of HBO, just a stepping-stone into the lucrative cable market of continental Europe.

Privately backed, lightly regulated, entertainment led, British cable sounds like the most raffish act of public buccaneering to have come our way in years.

There is no doubt that British broadcasting will be seriously affected, as will cinema and video. But the White Paper's bland philosophy of natural progress has little to say about the needs of our national culture. Pompous to the last, its final chapter is titled 'The Way Forward'. But the question it doesn't ask is simple. Does this 'way forward' lead to a future we want?

Monopoly

Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, the Monopolies Commission finally reported their findings earlier this year after more than two years of investigation. The devil being, in this case, the subtle, almost fantastic web of regulations which keeps two cinema chains (Rank, EMI) and two distributors (Columbia-EMI-Warner, United International Pictures) in control of 60 per cent of the British film market. The deep blue sea is that, despite the Commission's findings, there seem to be no remedies. Any drastic measures would only push the circuits one step closer to their Final Solution: liquidating many existing cinemas.

In 1966 the Commission had already investigated the state of the British cinema and found it wanting—for insufficient competition between Rank and EMI, for restrictive practices, etc. Seventeen years on, the monopoly situation has hardened in a declining market. In 1965 four cinema circuits (Rank, EMI, Classic, Star) controlled 37 per cent of screens. Now two circuits (Rank, EMI) control 39 per cent of screens, representing almost 50 per cent of cinema seating capacity. In the same period, film distribution has also 'consolidated'. By 1980 eight distributors accounted for 90 per cent of all the licence fees paid for films in Britain.

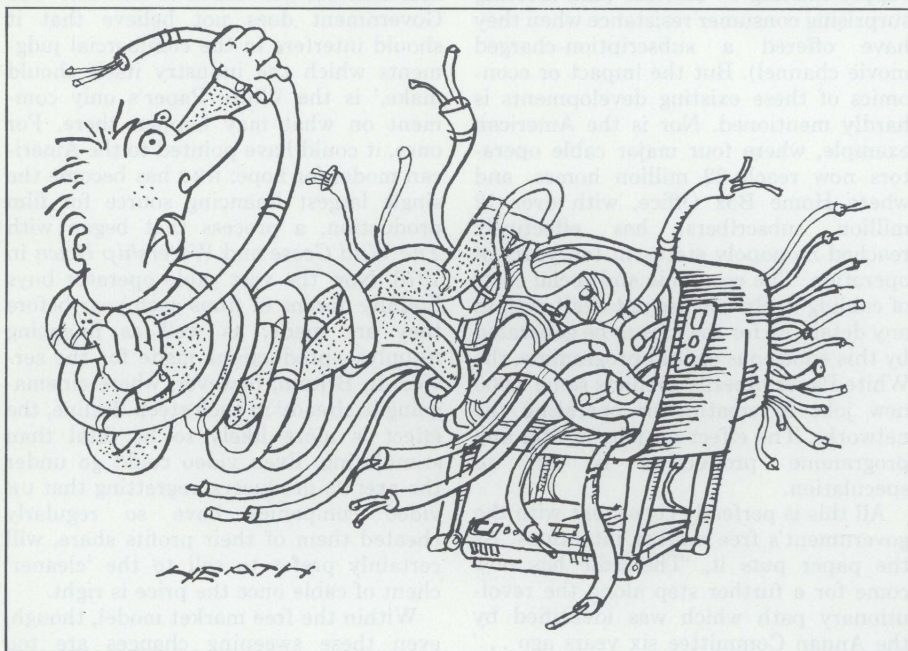
Two of these (ITC, Brent Walker) have since severely cut back their activities, presumably leaving six companies in control of the same share. The top two (UIP and CEW) now probably hold at least 60 per cent of the market.

The facts are dismal. In twenty years, UK admissions have dropped by 85 per cent (compared with 35 per cent in continental Europe and 20 per cent in the US). Cinema ticket price inflation has outstripped the Retail Price Index at a rate of 2:1 for over two decades. Profits on distribution of films in the UK have finally collapsed in the last three or four years—down by almost two-thirds for the leading companies. And in the face of disaster the existing quadrille of two distributors and two exhibitors has stood its ground.

'If an exhibitor is unable to come to any satisfactory arrangement (in a trade dispute) ... he may refer to the TDC, consisting of two SFD representatives and two CEA representatives, one of whose places may be taken by a representative of the AIC if one of its members is involved ...' Just a sample paragraph from the report, but one gets the idea: the industry, so streamlined by monopoly as audiences decline, is also a minefield of opposing interests. Despite the desiccated civil service prose, the flashes of irony are inescapable. 'Such applications are extremely rare,' is one comment on an elaborate negotiating procedure intended to oil machinery which has already rusted itself to a standstill.

As the report staggers towards its close, like a soldier thigh deep in mud, the sense of absurdity in the exercise simply grows. Both the leading distributors argue that alignment (the system by which distributors traditionally release their titles through one cinema circuit or the other) is acceptable because it makes for orderly releasing; both leading exhibitors argue that economies of scale mean that they do the best job of supplying films to the public. No one admits what even the humblest cinemagoer can observe: that films are left running, exclusively, at certain city-centre screens for far too long, and that independent or competing screens in the same cities, 'barred' by the circuit screens, are starved of the titles they so badly need.

The fact is that the two leading distributors and two leading exhibitors have steadily increased their share of a market whose overall collapse is finally catching up with them. But it is too late for any outside body to come up with anything approaching a solution—that would mean drastic pruning, heavy investment in the cinemas themselves, and probably a substantial level of government subsidy as well. Instead, the Commission, unable to recommend that Rank and EMI be divested of many screens (because that would simply mean closure), has come up with 'solutions' which sadly echo those proposed in 1966. It recommends an end to barring; it recommends that popular



films (those released in more than sixty prints) only be allowed to play exclusively in one location for a maximum of four weeks; it recommends that outsiders be brought into the industry's Trade Disputes Committee, to break the circle of self-interest. But it is all too late. In 1966 we had a cautious report of growing problems. In 1983 we have had a warning of imminent disaster. All that remains, probably before the end of this decade, is a polite obituary for British exhibition, the unfortunate victim of monopoly practices and business suicide.

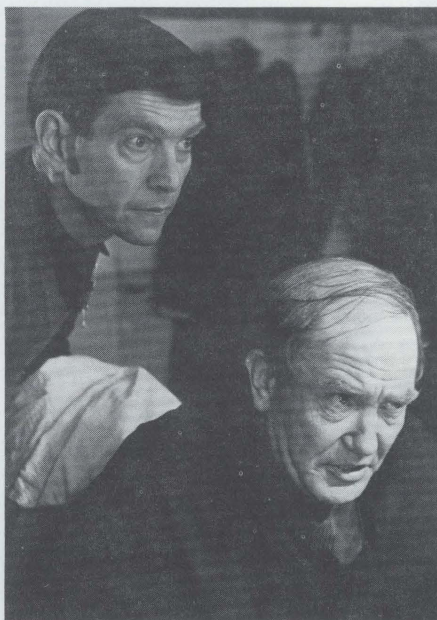
Sayles

Three years ago, at the London Film Festival, writer-director John Sayles mentioned in passing a project based on his own high school experiences, about a working-class boy in New Jersey who dreams of becoming the new Sinatra. The project would feature 'a great soundtrack, including several numbers by Bruce Springsteen.'

Three years on, the film has been made and released in the United States, by Paramount, but is nowhere to be seen on their release schedule here. At a budget of \$3m, and with no stars, it's just too small for UIP, the studio's distributing agents, to handle. Sayles has become internationally known in two ways. A series of scripts (including *Piranha*, *The Lady in Red*, *The Howling* and *Alligator*) marked him out as a strong commercial screenwriter. The reputation was confirmed by his commission to write a sci-fi fantasy for Spielberg, entitled *Night Skies* (and never made). Meanwhile, his first effort as a director, *The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, budgeted at a mere \$70,000, became a cult movie, and one of the titles that nudged the American majors into distributing independent and 'art' films. Sayles went on to direct *Lianna*, another low-budget chamber piece.

But *Baby, It's You* is the first project to cross the boundary which has so far divided his work—between Hollywood screenwriting and East Coast auteurism. 'We had done several rewrites on the script for Fox,' recalls Sayles. 'Finally Amy Robinson and Griffin Dunne, the producers, scraped up a bank loan. During editing Paramount picked up the picture for distribution. It was brought in for \$3m, which for me was enormous and for them was the smallest thing they had done in years. And it's a real hybrid—independent in origins and casting, but a studio picture at the finish. In the end I was happy with it—after fighting for final cut.'

Set and shot in Hoboken, New Jersey, where Sayles lives, it's the story of a 1966 high school romance between an ambitious middle-class girl and a working-class boy with stars in his eyes. And, as



Tom Courtenay and Albert Finney, stars from an earlier 'renaissance', in Peter Yates' *The Dresser*.

Sayles promised, the soundtrack is an extraordinary medley of Springsteen, Burt Bacharach, Lou Reed and others. So far, there have been two John Sayles at work: literary, quizzical, serious in his stories and in the film-novels of *Secaucus Seven* and *Lianna*; quipping, ducking and diving his way through the requirements of tongue in cheek monster movie scripts. To see the two talents in harness would be good news. Perhaps, as their Christmas good deed, UIP could oblige us...

Productivity

It may be a mirage drifting provocatively over the desert we know so well, but 1983-84 should be a bumper year for independent British production. At one end of the scale, the BFI's long awaited Sally Potter project with Julie Christie is about to leave the cutting rooms, ingeniously retitled *Goldiggers of '84*. At the other end, Jeremy Thomas, with one commercial disaster (*Eureka*) and one hit (*Merry Christmas*, *Mr Lawrence*) to his name this year, has suddenly announced a spate of productions; Stephen Frears is directing a modern gangster film, *Hit*; Nicolas Roeg is to make a comedy, *Insignificance*, and Skolimowski will direct *Victor Post*.

Certainly, this is not the direct result of investment by Channel 4 or Goldcrest, though both are contributing to the new optimism—the former with films by Mike Leigh and Chris Petit; the latter with the continuing *First Love* series and, more importantly, two theatre adaptations, Peter Yates' version of *The Dresser*, by Ronald Harwood, and the Alan Marshall production of *Another Country*.

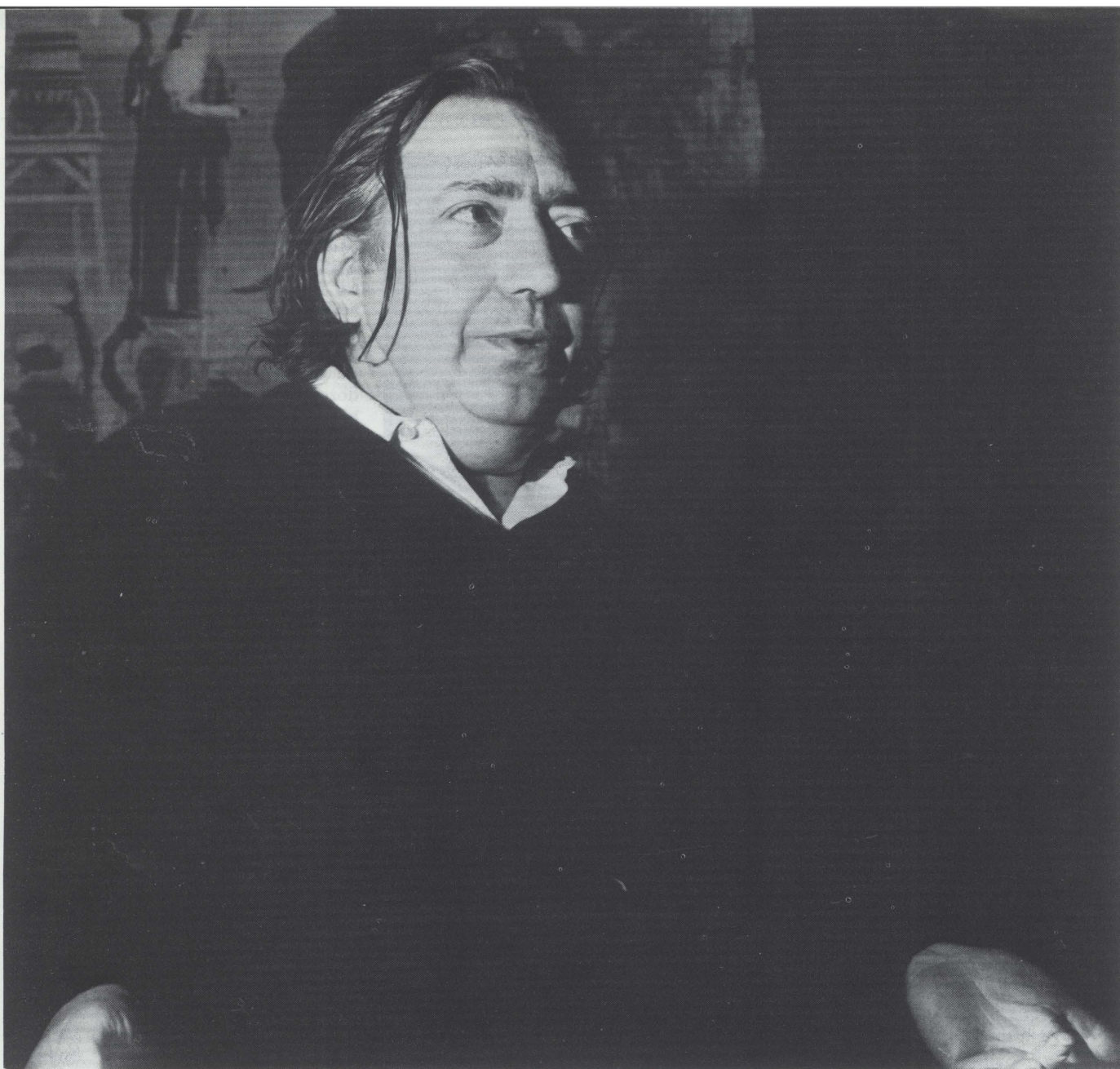
What is more cheering is the diversity of funding: Mark Forstater is backing Paul Bartel's new comedy, about yellow journalism and political corruption, entitled *Not for Publication*, from private British sources. Ismail Merchant has set up *The Bostonians* (from Henry James) and *The Deceivers* (from John Masters), with investment from Rank, Rediffusion Films, and others. Impresario and producer Michael White is developing half a dozen projects, including *Taramasalata*, a comedy by Clare Peploe, and *White Mischief*. And Mark Shivas (who with Michael White delivered last year's *Moonlighting*) plans to shoot *The Private Function*, a period comedy written by Alan Bennett, early next year. Producers Clive Parsons and Davina Belling are reuniting with Bill Forsyth for *Comfort and Joy* (having previously produced his breakthrough picture, *Gregory's Girl*).

But the most exciting development is to see two new and relatively small distribution companies leaping into production with such determination: Palace Pictures are backing Neil Jordan (*Angel*) to direct a modern werewolf fable, *Company of Wolves*; Virgin Films are now completing Richard Eyre's *Loose Connections* and making the period drama *Secret Places*, having already announced that they will produce *The Cement Garden* and a film from a novel by film critic Dave Pirie, *Mystery Story* (to be produced by Barry Hanson).

It is too early to say whether this will add up to more than the periodic flash in the British pan. But after so many years when British meant international casting or epic production values, we can hope that a handful of modestly budgeted movies will now result that can attract British audiences and foreign buyers. Goldcrest has supplied the bullish mood (though not, so far, any particularly surprising films). Perhaps some of the smaller companies and unaffiliated producers can now supply the imaginative spark and light the flame.

ALMEREIDA





Children of the Cinémathèque

Richard Roud's 'A Passion for Films', the story of Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française, will be published by Secker and Warburg on the 10th October. This chapter, which has been slightly abridged here, takes up the story of the Cinémathèque in the years immediately after the war – the period when Langlois helped to shape a generation of French film makers.

Langlois was never the president of the Cinémathèque—always secretary-general. In the early days there was not much need for a president. But during the war, just after the release of Jean Grémillon's most successful film, *Le Ciel Est à Vous*, Langlois asked Grémillon to be president, even though the Cinémathèque at the time was, according to Georges Sadoul, merely a 'fragile fiction, a bizarre magma'. Langlois and Grémillon were members of the French Cinema Liberation committee, and after Paris was liberated Grémillon was the one who received famous visitors

at the offices on the avenue de Messine. In December 1944, for example, he welcomed Marlene Dietrich and Jean Gabin. He did not have much to do with the day-to-day running of the Cinémathèque or the Cercle du Cinéma, but he and Langlois were good friends, and his presence did much to enhance the growing prestige of the Cinémathèque.

At the end of the war, the Cercle du Cinéma resumed its weekly screenings at the little cinema opposite the Langlois apartment, the Studio de l'Etoile. Mary Meerson recalls that on V-E Day the film screened—by chance—was *L'Age d'Or*.

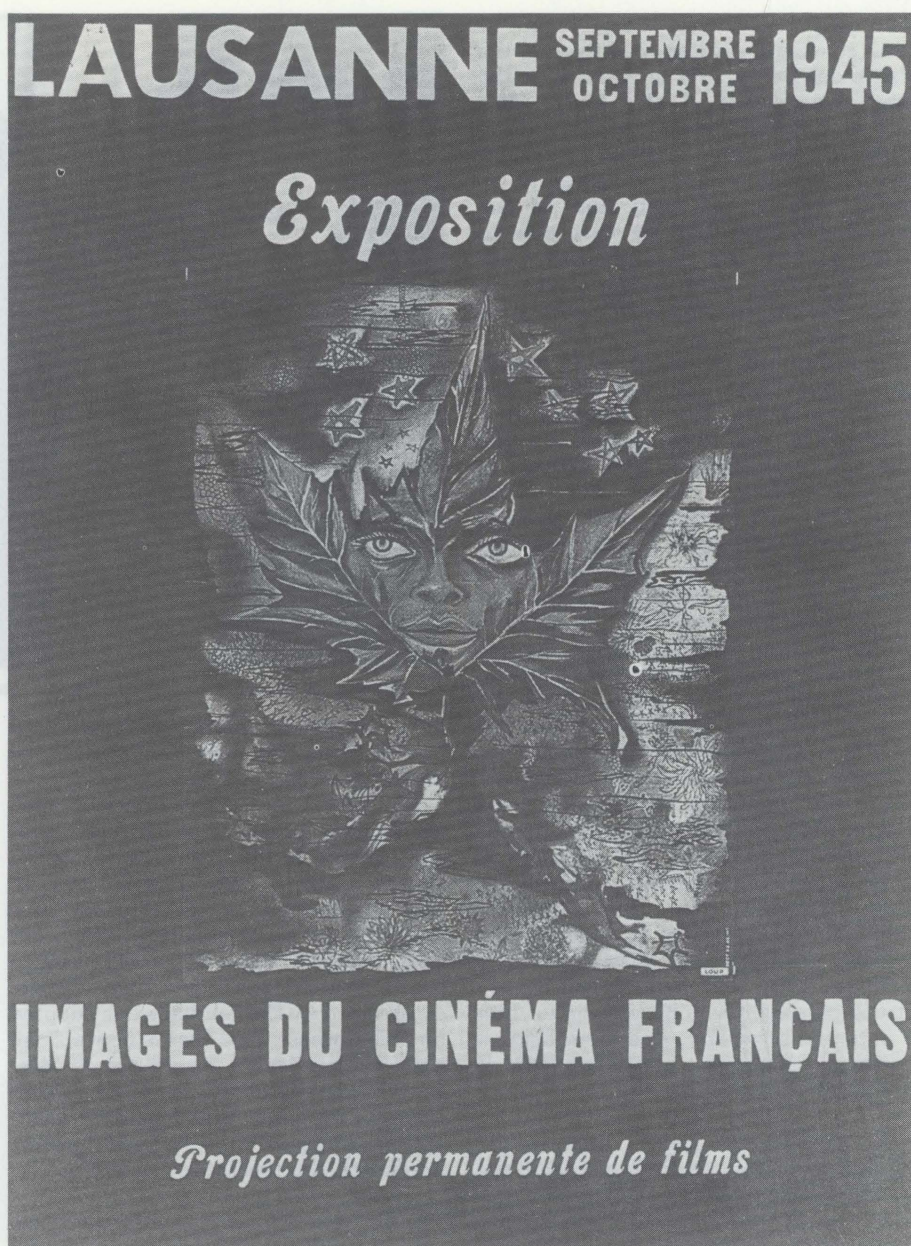
But now the demand for tickets exceeded the number of seats, and typically, Langlois selected those who could become members by giving them a questionnaire to see how much they knew—and therefore presumably cared—about the cinema. Alain Resnais tells me he managed to pass the test: the only question he can remember was 'Who is Bertolt Brecht?' For most Frenchmen in 1945, Brecht, if known at all, was simply the author of *The Threepenny Opera*.

In 1946 the Cercle du Cinéma moved to a theatre in the Musée Guimet, place d'Iéna. Interestingly enough—in light of Langlois' later views on the subject—the silent films at the Salle d'Iéna were accompanied by piano music played by no less a personage than Joseph Kosma. Langlois, says Mary Meerson, scrupulously refrained from recording those brilliant piano improvisations—only to be told later by Kosma that he wished Langlois had recorded them, because he couldn't remember what he had played and could have used some of it for other purposes.

When Langlois could no longer afford to have piano accompaniment, he convinced himself that silent films *shouldn't* be played with music. This in spite of the fact that in commercial cinemas there had always been accompaniments—with orchestras in the first-run theatres, Wurlitzer organs in second-run, and pianos in the rest. He made a virtue out of necessity and built up a theory that the visual rhythm of the silent film was sufficient in itself and could only be spoiled by music.

Even before Langlois decided to convene a congress of FIAF [the International Federation of Film Archives] in Paris in 1946, he had already resumed his proselytising efforts abroad. One of his exhibitions in Lausanne was instrumental in the establishment of the Cinémathèque Suisse, according to Freddy Buache, its founder.

Langlois organised in Lausanne in 1945 a large exhibition called 'Images du Cinéma Français'. 'People like me,' Buache wrote, 'who were twenty years old and who had grown up in a country surrounded by war, who were only able to see German films, with no knowledge of the classics, were almost completely ignorant of film history. We knew that Eisenstein existed, but we had never seen *Potemkin*. We knew that *Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or* existed, but they were myths for us. So when Langlois organised this great exhibition at the Fine Arts Museum of Lausanne, along with screen-



Poster for the 1945 Lausanne exhibition.

ings of extracts from some of these unknown films, I went every day. I could see at the exhibition photos of *Les Vampires*, sets by Méliès, and a lot of other things, from the wax head of Micheline Presle in *La Nuit Fantastique* [Marcel L'Herbier] to the maquettes for *Children of Paradise*. Finally, when I went into the little room where extracts of films were being shown continuously, in loops, I was thunderstruck by the revelation of films like *Un Chien Andalou*, *Entr'acte* and *Le Brasier Ardent*.

'I came out, my head in a whirl, and asked the first person I saw, "When do these films get shown again?" "In an hour," I was told. So I went back over and over again. I talked to one or two of the people there—Langlois and Jean Grémillon—whose names didn't mean anything to me. Langlois was very nice to me; we had dinner together and at night went to screenings of French "primitive" film. So it was from all this that I got the idea, along with some friends, of creating a *cinémathèque* in Lausanne. There was a Swiss archive already, set up in 1943 in the Basle Museum of Fine Arts. The idea

was to include film in the activities of the museum just as the Museum of Modern Art in New York had done. But it never came to much, and eventually they agreed to give us the collection of films they had amassed.'

By 1950 the Cinémathèque Suisse was officially inaugurated in Lausanne, where it still thrives under the direction of the same Freddy Buache. His relationship with Langlois was to have its ups and downs, but they often exchanged films, and it was thanks to Buache that Langlois was always able to show one of Max Ophüls' best films, *La Signora di Tutti*.

Langlois also continued to help the Cinémathèque de Belgique—again, independently of FIAF. In the words of André Thirifays, 'In 1945, after the war, I saw Langlois again, and he persuaded me to revive our Cinémathèque, which already existed legally but was not very active. In 1945 we had very few films, and Langlois said, "I'll lend you all the films you want—that way you can show them, make a little money, and build your Cinémathèque." And it was his pressure that gave new life to the Cinémathèque

de Belgique. For a year, Langlois sent us films constantly—we showed them in the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels in the large concert hall. I also found films myself in Belgium that had not been destroyed by the Germans. I bought some, but mostly they were given to us. So by 1946 we had thirty films of real importance. And then we were able to exchange with the other archives. Langlois had made us members of FIAF in 1946. We got no money from the state until 1960.

Langlois also mounted some prodigious exhibitions for us—Méliès and other pre-World War I directors, animated film—and then in 1949 we had our first experimental film festival in Knokke-le-Zoute. This show was organised by Langlois and Georges Sadoul, and by Jacques Ledoux, who had just joined us—he was a student at the time. Ledoux was Polish by origin, and his parents were executed in Brussels during the war, but he escaped. He was taken in by some Catholic monks, and he adopted the name of Ledoux. After the war he went back to the university, but he was already bitten by the cinema bug. Henri Storck introduced him to me, saying he'd work for nothing at the Cinémathèque. That was in 1947. I was secretary-general, and we had fifteen employees. Over a period of years Langlois deposited over three hundred important films with us. At the beginning Ledoux liked Langlois very much. But Langlois knew that Ledoux had a very strong personality, so he became for him a potential adversary. And from being a potential adversary, Langlois made of him a real opponent.*

All these agreements between the Cinémathèque Française and the new groups were bilateral. FIAF was a much more official, even bureaucratic affair. FIAF started its activities again when Langlois held the 1946 Congress in Paris, the first since one in New York before the war. By this time Franju had had enough of both the Cinémathèque and FIAF, and resigned as secretary-general. Iris Barry replaced the absent Hensel as president.* The political climate was such that, opportunisticly, FIAF decided to make Gosfilmofond—the Soviet Film Archive—a 'retroactive' founder-member, thus erasing almost all traces of Hensel and the Reichsfilmarchiv.

After Lotte Eisner returned to the Cinémathèque and became its curator, she began to collect the objects—costumes, sets, stills, drawings—that would be used for Langlois' small exhibitions. Although there were no screenings yet at the avenue de Messine, the offices were there, and there Langlois put on shows of costumes, posters and set designs: in

*Frank Hensel, of the German Reichsfilmarchiv, had been prewar president of FIAF. As an army officer in Paris during the Occupation, he helped Langlois store films in the cellars of the Palais de Chaillot. The Cinémathèque's headquarters, at 7 avenue de Messine, were in a building also used by the Reichsfilmkammer, the official German film office.



On the set of *Baisers Volés*: Truffaut, Léaud, Langlois.

1945, 'Images du Cinéma Français'; and in 1946, the works of Emile Reynaud, the important French 'primitive'.

The Cercle du Cinéma was too small, too select a forum for all the films Langlois wanted to show: there were neither enough seats nor enough screenings. In 1947 it gave way to the Cinémathèque Française as an organisation which not only preserved films but screened them on its own premises. The small theatre constructed by the Germans was adapted for this purpose. And that is how a small *hôtel particulier* on the avenue de Messine, diagonally across from the Galerie Maeght, then the most important modern art gallery in Paris, became the most important film theatre in the world.

The year 1948 was an important one. First of all, Langlois inaugurated a museum, the Musée Permanent du Cinéma, on the avenue de Messine, along with its screening room—about fifty seats. Then, as after, his legal fiction was that one bought a ticket to see the museum, and then paid one old franc extra to see the film—thus enabling the Cinémathèque to function not as a cinema but as a museum. In 1948 he also got the government to donate part of the abandoned fort of Bois d'Arcy—in the suburbs of Paris—for the Cinémathèque to store its films.

Janet Flanner (Genêt) has given an evocative description of the atmosphere of the avenue de Messine: 'The mysterious magic lantern atmosphere of its shabby foyer—a tortuous black little maze, illuminated by lights that shine through and give form to the images on the strips of movie film decorating its walls. Another feature of its decor is a startling life-size blow-up of a white-capped man, dressed in white tights, who has one foot lifted—the anonymous "Walking Man". This and "Flying Birds" are thought by many to be the first true motion pictures; they were taken in 1888 by the French physiologist Etienne [-Jules] Marey with his synthesising

photography gun, which looks vaguely like any gun to kill people or birds with and is also on display in the shadowy foyer... It also possesses the first example of today's animated cartoons: lovely little hand-painted pictures of jugglers and top-hatted Amazons, shown on the Paris boulevards in 1892 by means of the rotating praxinoscope, invented by the tragically ill-rewarded artist Emile Reynaud.' (*The New Yorker*)

The little theatre on the avenue de Messine began by showing a repeating cycle of '100 Masterpieces'. Only one film was shown per night, but it was projected twice. Later, this would change to the familiar rhythm of three different films a night—6:30, 8:30, 10:30.

Now that the Cinémathèque was open to anyone who could get in, it became the centre for a group of young men—later called Children of the Cinémathèque—who were to form their own film clubs, to become film critics, mostly for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and then to make films. They were François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette and Claude Chabrol—the godchildren of Henri Langlois.

'Up to 1934,' Langlois has reminded us, 'a young man of twenty living in Paris could have seen almost all the great films that had ever been made, since it was sufficient for him to have frequented neighbourhood theatres in his childhood and adolescence to have caught up with the films made before he was born.' As Eric Rohmer later remarked: 'Can you imagine a budding musician who was unable to listen to the works of Bach or Beethoven, a young writer who was not able to read the works of the past by going to a library? So by what right is the budding film-maker (or film critic) denied the same rights?' Furthermore, because of the war, many American and foreign films were unknown to a whole generation of *cinéphiles*. 'For the cinema to have a future,' said Rohmer, 'its past could not be allowed to die.' And in the screening room of the avenue de Messine,



Langlois at work on an exhibition.

this young generation devoured the films of the past.

François Truffaut's first encounter with Langlois, he told me, 'was not actually at the Cinémathèque itself, but at a screening put on by the Cinémathèque at the Lycée Montaigne on a Sunday afternoon. I must have seen an ad for it in the *Ecran Français*—that's the only way I could have known about it. I seem to remember it was a screening of some Griffith shorts—*The New York Hat*, for example. I even think that that was the first time I ever saw André Bazin [Truffaut's mentor and father figure, and the most important film theorist of his time]. But I can't be sure—there were so many things happening at once then, all kinds of *ciné-clubs*. Anyhow, when I first saw Langlois, I thought he looked like Robert Newton in *Odd Man Out*. As for the avenue de Messine, I first started going there in, probably, 1947 [but it must have been 1948], and it was there that we all met—Rivette, Jean-Luc, a Polish-born girl called Liliane, Suzanne Schiffman, and a Swedish girl whose name I can't remember. We always met there. My first surprise at the avenue de Messine was that sometimes the screenings ended very late, after the last metro, so one had to walk home. I would go see a film called *Birth of a Nation* without realising how long it was. Actually, I did have contact with Langlois in 1948—correspondence. I had written to ask him to let my *ciné-club* borrow prints of *Entr'acte*, *Un Chien Andalou* and Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*. He answered that we could show the first two, but claimed he had no print of the Cocteau film.

'At the avenue de Messine, I didn't see too much of Langlois: the person we saw most was Frédéric Rossif [who was later to become a film-maker, too: *To Die in Madrid* and other montage films], because it was he who tore the tickets at the entrance. He was a threatening figure for us, because we tried to stay inside between screenings so as not to have to

pay for the next one. Musidora, the silent film star, was always there too, at the entrance, and Lotte Eisner, but I don't remember seeing Mary Meerson.'

Truffaut talked to Langlois only once in those early days. 'I was leaving for the army (I volunteered in 1950), and I went and asked Langlois whether, if I gave the Cinémathèque my files, would he let me in free to the screenings after I came back from the army. He said yes, so I rented a cart, and brought all my "treasures" to the Cinémathèque. They weren't particularly valuable—stupid press cuttings and a lot of stills I had stolen from cinemas.

'The Cinémathèque was really a haven for us then, a refuge, our home, everything. There were only about fifty seats, and we had the habit of not sitting down, but of lying on the floor in front of the first row of seats—especially for the popular films. Langlois used to reproach the audience for coming only to the popular films, the classics, and he was right. I remember films like *Kühle Wampe* [directed by Slatan Dudow, script by Bertolt Brecht] where there were only five or six people in the theatre.

'Langlois and Bazin were not great friends, you know. Langlois didn't have too much respect for critics. You can tell that when you read his own texts. They're very much like conversation... although often very apt. But Bazin's intelligence was more Sartrean, acutely reasoned. Sometimes his arguments had little to do with the actual film he was writing about. I think Langlois didn't like the professorial side of Bazin. Bazin was a professor, he was a proselytiser, and he was didactic. And Henri must have been against all that. He wanted to show films and let it go at that.

'He believed in education by osmosis, and I felt that way, too. But Bazin liked the Cinémathèque and he liked Langlois. And Bazin went to the Cinémathèque all the time. I must admit now that, looking back, I used to behave quite badly at the avenue de Messine. I used to try to get in without paying; I used to smoke during the screenings; and I used to try to see three screenings for the price of one.

'In those days my judgment of films was very fluctuating, so I depended a lot on Rivette, who was a great influence on me. I was impressed by everything I saw in those early days—the films were like a drug for me. And seeing silent films for the first time was a great shock. The first films I remember really liking sincerely were Vigo's. I didn't need anyone's advice or persuasion for them, whereas I never in those days had a very precise judgment on silent films.

'At the Cinémathèque I used always to listen to what everyone else said—the conversations on the way out of the cinema. When I got out the army, I went back to the avenue de Messine, and began to write in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Arts-Spectacles*, and then I really came to know Langlois.'

Jacques Rivette expressed his debt to Langlois similarly: 'I remember the avenue de Messine with its fifty seats, which were full only for *L'Age d'Or*, *The Blue*

Angel or *Potemkin*, but were practically empty for the films of Griffith, Stiller and Murnau. At the end of 1949 I was a young man from the provinces, and it was there I met Truffaut and Godard—at those screenings when there were only five or six people in the theatre.'

And Godard said that 'but for his titanic efforts, the history of the cinema would have remained what it was for Bardèche and Brasillach [writers of the first French film history, *Histoire du Cinéma*, in 1935, later translated into English by Iris Barry]—souvenir postcards brought back by a pair of amiable but not very serious students from the land of darkened auditoriums.

'One can see immediately the revolution that might be effected in the aesthetic of moving pictures by this new vision of historicity... I will simply say that, thanks to Henri Langlois, we now know—to choose at random—that ceilings do not date from *Citizen Kane* but from Griffith (of course) and Gance; cinema vérité, not from Rouch but John Ford; and the camerawork of *Metropolis* from an anonymous French cameraman [Félix Mesguisch], contemporary with the academic salon painter Bouguereau. We know, too, that Alain Resnais and Otto Preminger have not progressed beyond Lumière, Griffith and Dreyer, any more than Cézanne and Braque progressed beyond David and Chardin: they did something different. Henri Langlois has given each twenty-fourth of a second of his life to rescue all these voices from the silent obscurity and to project them on the white sky of the only museum where the real and imaginary* meet at last.'

Although Langlois always claimed that he was not a teacher, that he had no didactic aims in view in programming the Cinémathèque, this was not quite true. He wanted to share his enthusiasm with as many people as possible, and by showing films that had not been seen for many years, he changed our ideas of film history. In the 40s and early 50s he rediscovered Feuillade and broadened our knowledge of the genius of Erich von Stroheim.

That Griffith was admired and Feuillade disdained during their lifetimes should not surprise us. The most successful playwrights of the nineteenth century are not always those who are revived today. It was difficult for critics of the 20s to separate Feuillade from the other, less talented directors of melodramas; to judge, one needs time. The French were able to appreciate Griffith immediately only because he was exotic for them—separation by space served the function of separation in time. After all, was not Feuillade just a maker of serials? Weren't they just melodramas? The leading lights, the avant-garde, were deceived both by the popular nature of the subject matter and by Feuillade's own declaration that he was 'just an artisan'.

Langlois said that he discovered

*A reference to André Malraux's *The Imaginary Museum*.

Feuillade only in 1936; at that time, he was considered a dreadful film-maker. 'By chance I happened to see *Fantômas* (1913), and I found it superb. Behind consecrated values, there were other values—not yet consecrated—and which were revealed to be also of importance.'

But, to be accurate, the films *had* been admired in the 1920s by the Surrealists: Louis Aragon, André Breton and Luis Buñuel; they felt an affinity for Feuillade's technique of situating bizarre adventures against everyday backgrounds. Buñuel once told Sadoul how much he preferred *Fantômas* and *Les Vampires* to the avant-garde films of the 20s—which he loathed. But ironically, Sadoul tells us, Buñuel didn't even know the name of the director of these films. So if the Surrealists (whom Langlois admired) were the real discoverers of *Les Vampires*, it was Langlois who saved Feuillade for posterity, who *imposed* him, not only as a great figure of the past, but as a precursor of a future cinema, an influence and an inspiration.

The rediscovery of Feuillade had a double effect: on the one hand, it rewrote cinema history, for Feuillade was a forgotten figure in France and was unknown in Great Britain and America. The other effect was Feuillade's influence on directors like Resnais, Franju and Rivette, whose original thirteen-hour version of *Out One* especially seems to show that influence. Up to 1944, it had often been said that the French cinema had two traditions—Méliès and Lumière, fantasy and reality, or what you will. But Feuillade became, as Francis Lacassin put it, the Third Man, and film-makers were struck by the mixture of realism and surrealism in his work.

Musidora, who had starred as Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*, worked for the Cinémathèque: in theory she was supposed to devote her time to collecting costumes, but like everyone else there, she did whatever Langlois needed done at any given moment. For a long time it was she—taking over from Langlois' mother—who sold tickets at the box office. But Alain Resnais remembers the evening when she presented in person *Les Vampires*, that 1915 film which many, including André Bazin, consider to be one of the greatest of all time.

In one of his essays Bazin recounts a Cinémathèque screening: 'That night only one of the two projectors was working. In addition, the print had no intertitles... The fact that the lights had to be turned on every fifteen minutes to change reels seemed to multiply the episodes. Seen under these conditions, Feuillade's masterpiece reveals the aesthetic principle that lies behind its charm. Every interruption evoked an "ah" of disappointment, and every fresh start a sigh of hope for solution. The story held our attention and carried us along purely and simply by the tension created in the telling. There was no question of pre-existing action broken up by intervals... the unbearable tension set up by the next episode to follow and the anxious wait [were] not so much for the events to come as for the continua-

tion of the telling, the restarting of an interrupted act of creation. Feuillade himself proceeded in the same way in making his films. He had no idea of what would happen next, and filmed step-by-step as the morning's inspiration came. Both the author and the spectator were in the same situation, namely that of the King and Scheherazade, the repeated intervals of darkness in the cinema paralleling the separating off of the Thousand and One Nights.' (*What Is Cinema?*)

Finding, preserving and showing films were not Langlois' only aims. Whenever it was possible, he tried to restore films to their original state. The most spectacular of these restorations was the sound print of Erich von Stroheim's 1927 *The Wedding March*. Stroheim's reputation as a director had always been higher in France than in America or Britain. Indeed, when Gavin Lambert, then editor of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, wrote his 1953 groundbreaking piece, 'Stroheim Revisited: The Missing Third in the American Cinema', there was no print of a Stroheim film in preservation in Great Britain. Lambert had gone to Paris to see *The Wedding March*. The results of that visit and of screenings of Stroheim films organised by Olwen Vaughan at the New London Film Society convinced him that 'time will restore Stroheim to his place as the missing third of the American cinema, along with Griffith and Chaplin, in the golden age—the twenty years between 1915 and 1935 when producers (sometimes to their cost) were more adventurous and censors more liberal...'

Langlois had first met Stroheim a few years before the outbreak of World War II. He had gone with Lotte Eisner and a few journalists to see Stroheim during his visit to Paris. 'They gave me a knockout blow in Hollywood,' Stroheim said bitterly, 'and I'm still a little groggy.' That is how Lotte Eisner remembered his first words to them. She and Langlois wished

they had had enough money to enable him to make a new film. This was impossible then, as it would be later, but just as Langlois dreamed of recovering the negative of Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* and inviting Eisenstein to put it together, so he dreamed of restoring the mutilated prints of Stroheim's films, almost none of which had ever been shown complete.

Years later, in the early 50s, when Stroheim had settled in France, they were able to show him his films in their theatre on the avenue de Messinè. It was the first time he had ever seen a release print of his 1924 *Greed*, which had been cut by nearly two-thirds, and he was horrified. In 1953 they showed him *The Wedding March*. After a few minutes he stood up and said, 'This is unbearable, boring, horrible.' Lotte Eisner looked at him, outraged at his sacrilege. Stroheim asked at what speed it was being projected. 'At the proper silent speed,' they proudly announced. 'Sixteen frames per second.' 'But we shot it at sound speed,' he said, 'twenty-four frames a second—there was music, on records, to accompany it.'

Neither Langlois nor Eisner knew that the film originally had synchronised music on discs, because it was shown that way only in America. The print they showed Stroheim had been acquired by Thomas Quinn Curtis from the estate of Patrick Powers, producer of the film for Paramount. Then late in 1953, a friend of Curtis', Russell Holman of Paramount, who happened to be in Paris, promised Curtis (a long-time friend and benefactor of Stroheim) that he would find the records and send them to Paris. Which in due course he did. And somehow Langlois managed to find the money to finance the transfer from discs to film.

The actual job was done by the well-known editor Renée Lichtig, together with Stroheim. The whole job had to be finished in a week because the film was to be shown at the São Paulo Festival in Brazil; so, as always at the

Musidora, who was later to sell tickets at the Cinémathèque, as Irma Vep in *Les Vampires*.



Cinémathèque, the job was completed by working through the night. As Lichtig described the task (in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No 37), the first step was to record the music on tape; then it was carefully synchronised—for there was not only music on those 33⅓ rpm discs but also the occasional sound effect. But because the original print had shrunk slightly with the passage of time, there was often a three or four second discrepancy per reel. So a little cheating was necessary; fortunately Stroheim was there and he was able to find a solution to each problem.

The sound version was a triumph at São Paulo. André Bazin reported: 'The *Wedding March* was a sound film, and we had forgotten that. Not only did this reconstruction restore the work to its true aesthetic speed, its own dramatic timing, but it showed once more how vain is the traditional opposition of the silent film and the sound film, as well as the supposition that there was a radical break between these two periods of the cinema.'

Langlois lent this print to the National Film Theatre in London in 1963 for the programme called 'School of Vienna', and later to the New York Film Festival, and in both places audiences and critics found it something of a revelation. Until then American audiences knew Stroheim only from the extremely mutilated *Greed* and *Foolish Wives*.

Alas, the story does not end here. For *The Wedding March* was originally meant to have been a much longer film. It was to make up a three-hour programme, thus leaving no room for the usual second feature; Stroheim detested the idea of a double bill. But as soon as he had shaped the first half of the film—what we now know as *The Wedding March*—the second part was taken out of his hands and entrusted, as Lotte Eisner puts it, to Stroheim's great rival, Josef von Sternberg. Sternberg, following studio instructions, made a film which could be shown independently: *The Honeymoon*. But since it would not make much sense to anyone who had not seen *The Wedding March*, Sternberg concocted a prologue from sequences in *The Wedding March*. *The Honeymoon* was never shown in America, but was given a limited European release.

According to Eisner, the 'digest' introduction irreparably damaged the rhythm of the film, but *The Honeymoon* did contain one unforgettable scene: 'The wedding night of the prince (Stroheim) and the beautiful lame daughter (ZaSu Pitts) of the corn-plaster magnate whom the prince has been forced to marry. Here Stroheim revealed the curious mixture of aversion and attraction felt by the prince towards his bride.'

According to those who saw it, *The Honeymoon* (known in France as *Mariage de Prince*) was only a shadow of a shadow. The Cinémathèque did possess a print of it—apparently the only one in existence—until 1959. It was stacked in the courtyard of the Cinémathèque building, rue de Courcelles, awaiting transit on a hot summer's day. The court-



The Wedding March: Matthew Betz, Fay Wray.

yard was partially covered with an iron-and-glass marquee, and that, we are told, was the cause of the fire that broke out in the summer of 1959. No one, I think, to this day knows just how many films perished in that fire, but *The Honeymoon* was one of them.

Some archivists doubted whether the fire actually ever took place—as if it had been a fake, a plot by Langlois to pretend that some films had been burned so he could hang on to them. I was in Paris at the time and can testify to the fire: I read about it in the newspaper early on the morning after it happened, and went to the Cinémathèque to offer condolences. The smell was still in the air, and Langlois was half crazed. It was probably grief, but it came out in paranoid fury; he thought, or pretended to think, that I had come to sneer, to crow over his misfortune. 'Go on,' he yelled, his face and clothes smudged with soot from cleaning up the wreckage, 'go back to the British Film Institute and tell them—they'll be glad to hear the news.'

But this rage lasted only a few minutes, and he calmed down and let me in to survey the gruesome scene. Was Langlois 'to blame' for the loss of *The Honeymoon*? Yes and no. No, because fires have broken out in the best-run archives—there have been several in the United States in the past few years. Yes, because in a well-run archive, films would not be piled up in an open courtyard on a hot day. But the Cinémathèque couldn't be well ordered because Langlois was always trying to do more than was humanly or financially possible. 'Well-run' archives refuse to take more films than they can 'properly' take care of. 'Well-run' archives would never allow a unique print out of the vaults, would never show it at all except on a Moviola or a similar viewing machine.

On the other hand, none of the well-run archives had ever thought of restoring the original sound to *The Wedding March*. No other archivist would have inspired people like Thomas Quinn Curtis or, indeed, Stroheim himself to give him the necessary material to do the job. Langlois' defects were the other side of

the coin of his qualities.

Langlois made amends to Stroheim, as it were, later, by obtaining two reels of the 'African footage' of Stroheim's *Queen Kelly*. This film, produced by Joseph P. Kennedy for Gloria Swanson, was interrupted by the coming of sound. That, added to the mounting costs of the shooting, seemed to Mr Kennedy to make the film not worth finishing. Stroheim was removed from the film before the production was completed, and his eleven-reel version was reduced to eight, reportedly by Miss Swanson herself. *Queen Kelly* was never released in the United States, but it was shown in Europe. From the stills, Langlois knew that although Miss Swanson's release print ends with Kelly's apparent suicide (a scene directed by Miss Swanson), some of the later part of the story was filmed.

Langlois was not the only one who knew this, of course. In an interview with Richard Griffith, then director of the film department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Herman G. Weinberg asked Griffith whether he had ever found any traces of the African sequences of *Queen Kelly*. 'Yes,' Griffith replied, 'a little over a year ago, Dudley Murphy told me he had some of the material and promised it to us.' 'Why haven't you got it yet?' asked Weinberg. 'Pure negligence,' replied Griffith, 'I was too busy to chase Dudley up about it.' Neither he nor anyone at the museum ever did 'find the time' to chase Dudley up about it, and now he is dead. Langlois, of course, did get those extraordinary two reels from Mr Murphy. Kelly (whose suicide turns out to have been unsuccessful) is called away to Africa by a telegram from her guardian aunt. The aunt operates a brothel in German East Africa, and on her deathbed forces Kelly to marry a degenerate drunken cripple. As anyone who knows Stroheim's work can imagine, it is a beautifully baroque and powerful sequence. Langlois lent it to the National Film Theatre in February 1965, where it was greatly appreciated. These twenty minutes don't entirely make up for the loss of *The Honeymoon*, but they go some way in that direction. ■

THE HAPPY ENDIN

In the obituaries which appeared in the British papers following the death of Luis Buñuel, there was uniformly lavish praise for one of the Masters of the Cinema. While everyone agrees that Buñuel is a Master, it is hard to think of the names of any pupils. Over the last twenty years, critics and discriminating audiences have moved towards the position of complete and happy agreement about Buñuel. He is a pillar of the Cinema Establishment. This is nothing less than he himself predicted when he asserted in film after film that the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie lay in its ability to absorb criticism over dinner. The critics and audiences who now laud his work are precisely the critics and audiences who dismissed with loathing his film *L'Age d'Or* in 1930.

Buñuel's films, certainly the best ones, please everyone. He ingratiates himself with his audiences. Perhaps he couldn't help it. He was a Surrealist when everyone was a Surrealist, his inspiration coming largely from the Surrealist poets and not from the painters. When Surrealism became more popular in the late 50s and 60s, Buñuel became more popular.

Buñuel was exotic in his Spanish-ness at a time when people were prepared to embrace images from societies other than French, Italian or American. He presented himself as a professional Spaniard. He was on the right side, that's to say the losing side, during the Civil War. He went into romantic exile in Mexico after living unrecognised in New York, so that when he emerged with the Grand Prix at Cannes in 1950 for *Los Olvidados* it was not only a novelty as a Spanish-speaking film, it also marked the return of the 'forgotten one'. Apart from its Surrealist overtones, the dream sequence, a Mexican version of neo-realism, *Los Olvidados* possessed what was to become a best-selling intellectual attraction of the next two decades: original sin, the conservative backlash.

Buñuel's Catholic upbringing provided him with the justification for everything, obsessions and hatreds. He was lucky to have such an easy target in his work and one which would be instantly acceptable everywhere. With *Los Olvidados*, and the subsequent films of the 50s, made in Mexico and in France, he was able to satisfy every taste simultaneously. Surrealism, Catholicism, Anarchy, Revolution in the Third World, Fetishism, Freudianism and social and political attitudes which would even find favour among Marxists. Buñuel built a bordello of intellectual taste where a critic

could find anything he wanted. He dressed his stories and characters in crazy underwear.

His visual style, on the other hand, was unpretentious, simple even. Buñuel's style comes largely from the content. The visuals created by Gabriel Figueroa were certainly distinctive. But with the French films, there was no evidence of that same style. Unlike, say, the films of Orson Welles, Buñuel's films changed visually according to where they were made and with whom. In this, too, there is a hint of opportunism, or maybe carelessness. Buñuel always said that he hated films with unusual camera angles and visual effects. He disliked artiness. Good. That attitude found favour everywhere as an ideal, ignoring the uncomfortable fact that most of the best films are extremely arty one way or another (Eisenstein, Stroheim, Antonioni, Godard).

Buñuel is the complete Spaniard. Unamuno points out that it is character-

de Jour to That Obscure Object of Desire. His career is a wonderful object lesson to show that things are not over until you're dead. While his films are not

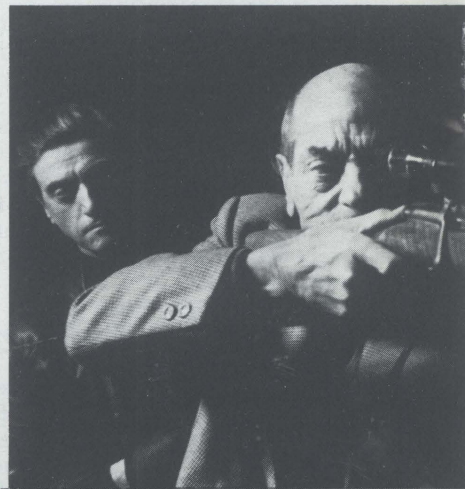
In *Un Chien Andalou* (1928).



Le Fantôme de la Liberté.

istic of the Spanish people to renew themselves when they feel close to death or extinction. Don Quixote changed his name when he was fifty years old and became a new man. When Spain itself was threatened politically in the 17th century it began to renew itself by creating another life in South America. Buñuel's life of exile, as we have been conditioned to call it, was in fact a typical Spanish renewal.

When he went back to Spain in 1960 and made *Viridiana*, Buñuel embarked on yet another phase which culminated in the group of French films from *Belle*



G OF LUIS BUNUEL



On set: *La Voie Lactée* (1969).



especially hopeful, his life and career is a model of optimism, especially in the cinema, where fashion is the muse.

Most critics have pointed out the persistence of certain themes in Buñuel's work: for example, 'Amour Fou'. For all the madness in his films (the mad being of course sane like Don Quixote and models for Laingian psychology), there is practically no love. Buñuel was thrilled by passion, but not by love. His men and

women are archetypes or stereotypes: the priest, the puzzled hero, the prostitute, the nurse or nun, the businessman, the doctor's wife. His characters depend for their vividness on fetishism. The fetish is an artist's answer to real love. It appeals to the sexual artist in all of us.

Buñuel's women are fabulous masochists. They love being maimed, tortured and degraded. How it comes about that the feminist movement seems not to question Buñuel is a total mystery. His attitude to women is right out of the pages of *Justine*. It is perhaps a tribute to the male critics over the past thirty years that Buñuel has not been spotted for what he is, a happy sadist.

The most impressive of his secret weapons is his humour, which never fails him. He understood that discreet charm perfectly; you can say anything if you do it with humour and your remarks will not be held against you. With his dark laughter, Buñuel managed to avoid life's Inquisition. The bourgeois desire to survive at all costs was not something he admired in his characters, but in his life and work it was a different matter.

In his introduction to *Two Spanish Picaresque Novels*, Michael Alpert defines the legendary Pícaro: '... which means rascal, or crafty good-for-nothing and is used to describe the hero... The Pícaro is usually a cynical youth brought up the hard way and determined to treat others as cruelly as he has been treated himself. His aim is to deceive and play cruel tricks on them... he reflects a world where the rule is "every man for himself". The Pícaro's goal is respectability, which means money, and of course he is keen to make the best showing he can for the world; Spaniards traditionally are.'

Take a look at Buñuel's last film, *That Obscure Object of Desire*. It employs the device of using two women to play one role in alternating scenes. Every critic remarking on this trick has asserted that it somehow represents the obscure object of the title, that's to say women, or woman. I read the film differently. I think the character of the businessman, Fernando Rey, is the obscure object of all our desires, male and female. He represents the bourgeois male fantasy of having two women at the same time. He is the last in the line of Buñuel's Pícaros. He is Buñuel himself, the film-maker who somehow couldn't lose. He knew what we wanted. ■

Paul Mayersberg

On set: *Le Fantôme de la Liberté* (1974).

Joseph Rosenthal: THE MOST GLORIOUS PROFESSION

Stephen Bottomore

An exhibition of
Joseph Rosenthal's photographs
will open at the
Photographers Gallery in London
on 11 October.

In September 1939, the day after Britain declared war on Germany, a man was to be seen wandering around the Wardour Street area of London, looking for a job as a war newsreel cameraman. His services were refused by every company he approached. It was not that he lacked experience, far from it; the problem was that he was seventy-five years old.

It was a characteristic act for Joseph Rosenthal. Age, like the other difficulties he had encountered in his long career as a cameraman, was something to be overcome rather than suffered quietly. He had first gained a reputation during the Boer War, when the popular press hailed him as an intrepid exponent of this new kind of war reporting and publicised the risks he took to get the films—dodging shot and shell while cranking away at his camera. Though not the first person to film warfare (there were amateurs before him, notably Frederic Villiers—see my article in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1980), Rosenthal was the first true professional. The Boer War was the springboard for a career involving years of travel round the world, years in which Rosenthal helped to invent the newsreel.

Until recently, little has been known about Rosenthal's life. During the last year, however, two things have happened to change this. First, a trunk was unearthed at the British Film Institute containing ephemera and photographic negatives which had belonged to Rosenthal. He was of course primarily a *film* cameraman; these pictures reveal him also as a skilled stills photographer.

Joseph Rosenthal:
South Africa, 1900.



Secondly, there is the rediscovery of the Will Day collection. Will Day was a collector and historian of the British cinema whose collection was sold to the Cinémathèque Française when it came up for auction in the 1960s. (Sadly, there was little interest from the BFI at the time.) I had known that there was material relating to Rosenthal in the collection, but it was only through the enthusiastic efforts of Michelle Snapes of the BFI Stills Department that the Cinémathèque was galvanised into locating a manuscript by Day entitled '25,000 Years to Trap a Shadow' which most experts believed had never been completed. The parts we have been sent concerning Rosenthal contain wholly new information; the entire manuscript may well be an important addition to British cinema history. Using these and other sources, I have managed to piece together an account of Rosenthal's life.

Joseph Rosenthal was born on 7 April 1864 into a Jewish family living in Whitechapel, East London. His father is listed as a 'shoe traveller'. Joseph himself became a pharmaceutical chemist, and was for years the dispenser at St George's Hospital. By way of chemistry he took up photography, and was fascinated when Edison's peepshow Kinetoscope, the forerunner of cinema, was introduced to London in 1894. By chance, his sister Alice got a job as a typist with Maguire and Baucus, American agents for the Kinetoscope in London; they were looking for photographic technicians, and in the latter part of 1896 Joseph was taken on. Though new training was needed, he made such progress that in the following year he was appointed head of staff.

In 1898 Charles Urban reorganised the company as the Warwick Trading Co, the emphasis shifting from distributing to actually making films. Rosenthal was sent on his first filming trips to Germany and Holland. Towards the end of the year he persuaded Urban to send him all the way to South Africa to film, and while there obtained two very newsworthy items: the Johannesburg 'Zarps' (police) who at the time were brutalising the Cape Coloured population; and also an 'animated portrait' of President Kruger which showed him 'as he leaves his residence and steps into his carriage... The well-known figure of "Oom Paul" is unmistakably delineated'.* Rosenthal said of his film of Kruger: 'That was the only one ever taken of him in South Africa. I had to approach him through his son, Chard Kruger, as the old man would never speak English.'

The following year, Rosenthal was sent again to South Africa on the ss *Carisbrooke* to record the voyage to the Cape with his Bioscope camera (courtesy of the Castle Steamship Company). And shortly after that he was in South Africa again,



Siege gun detachment fording the Vaal river in May 1900. The photograph, like the others in this article, is by Joseph Rosenthal.

this time to film the Boer War. This was certainly the most important assignment he had undertaken till then, perhaps the most important of his career. For this reason (and to clarify some of the confused accounts previously published), I devote the bulk of the article to this campaign.

The war broke out on 11 October 1899, the basic cause being the Boers' denial of political rights for the mainly British 'Uitlanders'. British aggressiveness led to a Boer ultimatum and the outbreak of hostilities. The Boers initially had the upper hand, attacking in the east in Natal and in the west on the border of the Orange Free State and Cape Colony. The British commander, Redvers Buller, unwisely counter-attacked on both fronts, and by December the war was going so badly for the British that a new commander, Lord Roberts, was appointed. He concentrated his attack from the south-west and gradually worked up through the Orange Free State. By February 1900 the British were winning.

The Warwick Trading Company under Charles Urban seems to have put a greater effort into filming the war than any other company. They claimed that they were the only film company to be given official sanction by the War Office. Two of their cameramen were there before Rosenthal. One, Edgar M. Hyman, was manager of a music hall in Cape Town and most of the films he took in the early stages were of regiments marching through the town on their way to the front. But others actually wanted to film troops in action. One such was an amateur, John M. Bennett-Stanford. He was the wealthy and eccentric owner of Preston Manor, near Brighton, and as an enthusiastic amateur photographer had filmed one scene at the battle of Omdur-

man in 1898. He now took his ciné camera to the western front in South Africa. The first film he made—probably the very first film of the Boer War—was taken on 12 November 1899 and shows the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers digging entrenchments at the Orange River. At the end of November Stanford went north to the Modder River, at some personal risk, and filmed the tail end of Methuen's battle there. As the Warwick catalogue recorded: 'While this view was taken, sniping by the enemy was still in progress, and occasionally is noticed a cloud of dust thrown up by a stray bullet.' On another occasion (possibly at Magersfontein a couple of weeks later), Stanford was filming a British artillery piece which came under sniper attack. When the film reached Urban's agent in England, he noticed that the filming had been 'left off in a hurry'. Apparently Stanford had been wounded. He would send no more films to England.

Stanford's films were being shown at the Alhambra Music Hall in London, where they aroused great enthusiasm. Urban was naturally keen to have a continuing supply and as a result at some point sent out Joseph Rosenthal. Some sources state that Urban dispatched him when Stanford's films stopped arriving (*History of the British Film*), others that he went out at the beginning of the war (Will Day). The latter may be true, but I have found no evidence for it. I have seen no claim by Rosenthal himself that he arrived before January 1900, a date which would be consistent with the theory that he was sent out to replace Stanford.

He recalled (*Bioscope*, December 1908) being at the second crossing of the Tugela in the middle of January, and at the British defeat at Spion Kop the following week. This was the culmination of many setbacks for Redvers Buller, and Rosenthal and other correspondents seem to

*Few films from this period survive—perhaps one in twenty. Therefore we often have to rely, as in this case, on the detailed descriptions in the companies' catalogues.

have given him up as a lost cause at this point and travelled west to join the rising star of Roberts' column. Rosenthal was temporarily assigned to General Clements' brigade which was transporting portable pontoon bridges. His first film of the war may have been 'Pontoons and guns en route for Orange River', number 5646 in the catalogue.

Meanwhile, Rosenthal's fellow Warwick cameraman, Edgar Hyman, having disposed of pressing commitments at his music hall, joined Roberts' column as it pushed north towards the Orange River. Hyman and Rosenthal seem to have joined forces here, and as if to celebrate the meeting, Hyman filmed Rosenthal crossing the pontoon bridge, carrying his Bioscope camera and tripod. (It is unclear what happened to Hyman after this. Will Day says he went to film with the Boers, though no such films appear in the catalogue; alternatively he may have gone back to Cape Town, returning to the front in time to film Roberts' entry into Pretoria in June.)

From the Orange River crossing, Roberts' army headed for the interior of the Orange Free State, and Rosenthal went with them, following the troops to the victory at Paardeberg in the middle of February. His baggage was not light. Equipment included two ciné cameras, '... one for 165 ft of film, and another carrying 650 ft, besides the tent, portable darkroom, and a few chemicals for testing the film before sending it home.' (*The Showman*, 1900) Altogether Rosenthal exposed 15,000 ft of film during the war (about four hours). He also had a stills camera, the stills apparently being for illustrating the Warwick catalogue. His food was mainly hard biscuit, with tinned meat as an occasional luxury.

His means of transport was a 'Cape cart' but he often abandoned it to get closer to the action: 'I travelled with two mules, one carrying my cameras, films and outfit, and the other carrying me, leaving my cart at the base. It was of the utmost importance that I should be able to be "mobile" ... and be able to move as quickly, and very often quicker, than the army. Thus I was in Bloemfontein before Lord Roberts arrived there.' (*Jewish World*, 3 August 1900).

When Roberts did arrive at Bloemfontein, Rosenthal was issued with an open pass which apparently enabled him to travel freely. This did not mean, however, that he had carte blanche to film freely as well. Roberts was a great believer in military censorship (he had after all introduced it during the Afghan campaigns twenty years earlier) and it was rigidly enforced by the press censor, Lord Stanley. Rosenthal had to give a complete description of what had been shot on each film before it could be despatched home, and it seems he had to give more than a description: Rosenthal tells us he had the necessary chemicals to test-develop films. Perhaps the reason

was not so much to see the results himself as to let the censor see them, and indeed one of his stills shows Lord Stanley examining one of his films at the front. (The military had obviously learned something about photography since the early days of the war; when Urban's agent received one of Stanford's films it was marked, 'Opened under martial law', and was almost ruined through exposure to light.)

But censorship was not the only problem. Most of Rosenthal's films taken around Bloemfontein were destroyed by more prosaic means: 'One series comprising an interview with Sir Alfred Milner [the High Commissioner] and Lord Roberts at Bloemfontein, was despatched by the *Mexican*, and the fate of that ship, which went down shortly after leaving Cape Town [at the beginning of April], was of course shared by the films ... Another set taken at Bloemfontein included "Hoisting the Union Jack", "The Balloon Contingent", "Entering Bloemfontein", etc, but this consignment was sent down by the convoy which the Boers captured [end of March], so this also was lost.' (*The Showman*, 1900) Raw film stock too was lost—the Boer commander De Wet captured and destroyed five thousand feet of it at Roodeval. He might have been more cautious had he known that Rosenthal was also filming the Boer side. One film he secured of the Boers seems to date from this time: 'War supplies and provisions arriving at a Boer laager by a train of ox teams.'

In March and April Roberts consolidated his position around Bloemfontein, but by the beginning of May he began to move north again. There were several rivers to ford in the Orange Free State (the Boers had blown up most of the bridges) and they became Rosenthal's favourite places to film; partly because rivers were virtually the only interesting features in an otherwise flat terrain, but also because at a river crossing the

armoured column would be in dense formation, giving maximum 'animation' to Rosenthal's pictures. It could be a dangerous place too; in crossing the Vet river drift, 'a shell exploded right in front of me, and it was very lucky indeed that I was not hit.' At about this time too he managed to film 'Boer prisoners under escort'. 'As they all pass closely by the camera every face ... is ... wearing a most dejected look.'

Roberts' column pressed on through Kroonstad (12 May), where Rosenthal filmed the town's surrender, and over the Vaal river where he took no less than six river crossing films. Through Elandsfontein, where he came under fire again, to Johannesburg and then to the final Boer stronghold of Pretoria. It was here that Rosenthal took his greatest risks, and at one point his horse was actually killed under him. The catalogue describes what must have been a spectacular film: 'Little clouds of dust are thrown up constantly by the enemy's bullets striking the ground ... Mr Rosenthal ... writes that Boer shells were bursting all around and overhead, and that but very few of the thousands of people who will see the reproductions of these films will think of the poor devil who turned the handle of the camera.' (*Overland Monthly* in 1901 stated that in the Boer War 33 per cent of war correspondents were killed or wounded or died of disease incurred in the course of their work—a much higher rate than for combatants.)

The following day, Rosenthal walked into Pretoria intending to get some more action shots. But the Boers didn't recognise his non-combatant status and he records that 'they started firing on me'. Fortunately he was saved by the intervention of some Canadian scouts and went over to the town square to make what was to be his last film of the war, 'Lord Roberts hoisting the Union Jack at Pretoria'.

Although the war was to drag on as a



British military policemen guarding a looted store.

guerrilla campaign for another two years, most of the correspondents, including Rosenthal, went home after the surrender at Pretoria on 5 June. The war had presented the cameramen who filmed it (half a dozen in all) with a major difficulty: it was not a conventional nineteenth century campaign. There was little hand to hand fighting, most of the casualties being caused by long range gunfire, and even in the earlier 'pitched battle' phase the Boers employed quasi-guerrilla tactics, using small, mobile mounted groups, snipers hiding behind rocks and so on. For the clumsy, static ciné cameras of the turn of the century, one could hardly imagine a more difficult subject. In the early phase of the campaign, the *Photographic News* suggested that the cinematographer would 'get much the same result as he would by photographing an anthill at a distance of several yards.' In 1904 (*Talking Machine News*), Charles Urban said of Rosenthal: 'He secured some fine pictures, but not a single what you would call real battle picture. You cannot get them; nobody can. Modern battles are at long distance; the bullets go "zip, zip", but you can't see the men who fired them; they are too far off. In the olden days it would have been different, when everything was at close quarters. But there were no Bioscopes then.'

One solution might have been to use telephoto lenses. Indeed, as early as May 1898 the *British Journal of Photography* suggested 'telephoto attachments' for filming the Spanish-American War. But this type of long focus lens for use in photography had only been invented in the early 1890s, and at the time of the Boer War it does not seem to have been possible to attach such lenses to the majority of cine cameras. The only Boer War cameraman who had such a lens was W. K. L. Dickson, whose large format camera—it used an early form of 70mm film—may have made it easier to fit one.

But Dickson writes of 'not being very sure of this new lens.' Usually, like Rosenthal, he had to stick to filming the British side with his standard lens.

In any case, the problem would have remained: the absence of any feeling of combat at close quarters. One answer would have been to intercut footage of the two sides, and this was indeed done with film of later wars, but editing was not a technique that had been developed at the turn of the century, when films were still presented as single takes or shots. The only solution to the problem was the one that was adopted: namely, faking.

Sham Boer War films were made in Lancashire and North London, and as far afield as Paris and New England. They showed actors dressed up as Boers and Britons shooting and bayoneting each other, all in full view of the camera—a proper conflict, with the two parties battling it out in the same frame. They were undeniably effective: 'far more successful in their representation of a conventional battle piece than a photograph [i.e. film] taken at the seat of war could possibly be,' said the *Amateur Photographer* in February 1900. Nevertheless there continued to be an intrinsic value attached to the genuine article, and the Warwick Trading Company claimed that it distributed nothing else, warning darkly: 'Do not discredit your Exhibits and the general Animated Picture Business by trying to fool the Public with Faked Films. You will be the loser in the long run if you do.'

Joseph Rosenthal didn't fake films, but he certainly set up at least one. The film in question still exists and is called 'A skirmish with the Boers near Kimberley'. In one scene, photographed from behind a hedge, a troop of British cavalry gallop towards us, stop dramatically, and set up two Maxim guns pointing directly over the hedge towards the camera. The film, presented as genuine, could not possibly

have been shot on a real field of battle because the cameraman would have been in the middle of the crossfire. But few audiences of the time would have been concerned about such questions of plausibility; they would simply have known, as Rosenthal knew when he filmed it, that it was a very effective shot.

Rosenthal returned to London in June 1900 and gave several interviews to an adulatory press. But at the other end of the world a conflict was stirring which required the presence of his Bioscope. This was the 'Boxer' rebellion in China. The 'Boxers', a nationalist organisation, wanted to expel all foreign elements. Their attacks on foreign legations led to a multinational expedition being sent in June, and over the next two months the rebellion was quelled. Rosenthal left London at the beginning of August, and when he arrived most of the action was over. But he had to film something to satisfy London audiences, and so he set about recording street scenes in Shanghai and other cities, showing where possible the destructive effects of the fighting. Though he managed to film some allied troops (the entry into Peking, for example), these were not by any stretch of the imagination war films. In fact the only scene he recorded which showed any element of conflict was in the occupied city of Tientsin, where the subdued Chinese 'show their dislike of the "Foreign Devil" who is photographing them by casting vicious looks in the direction of our artist.' (To compensate for the absence of the real thing, fakes were again produced, the most famous being Williamson's 'Attack on a Chinese Mission', and Urban again warned against these 'sensational representations'.)

At the end of the year Rosenthal left China for a similar colonial conflict in the Philippines, where the United States was engaged in putting down a rebellion. Again, the type of warfare—guerrilla tactics—was unsuitable for filming, though Rosenthal did manage to record three battle incidents. Most of his films, however, were scenic views of the country, sometimes showing American battle cruisers moored in harbour and the like. Once again fakes were produced. A New York newspaper, displaying a growing sophistication about the nature of war filming, said of one of these: 'If it is what it is represented to be, the camera must have been stationed . . . in the direct line of fire, when the picture was taken.' (*Image*, December 1959)

From the Philippines, Rosenthal returned to his Far Eastern base of Hong Kong. He may have visited Japan next, but in any case, by May 1901 he was in Australia filming yet another colonial event, this time a peaceful one, the opening of the Australian Federal Parliament by the Duke of Cornwall and York. Always keen on royalty and the Empire,

British casualties of the Boer War.



Urban believed that 'it was absolutely necessary that an animated photograph of the event should be secured.' The Australian authorities were apparently not so convinced; but as the catalogue says, 'having given our Mr Rosenthal a free hand, and being a man of great resources, he was enabled to cope with and overcome the restrictions of officialdom.' Indeed, so persuasive was he that by the time the royal party reached Sydney the authorities had erected a special camera platform 'for the exclusive use of our operator'.

In the latter part of 1901 Rosenthal was fulfilling routine assignments in Holland and Denmark. In the new year he was in Egypt. Meanwhile, Charles Urban was negotiating a major deal with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company to film 'scenery and life throughout Canada, ranching, harvesting, etc'. The CPR made clear to Urban what it *didn't* want: 'No snow scenes will be taken... neither Canada nor the CPR will be connected with Indian scenes without the consent of this company.' (Letter in Rosenthal Collection, BFI) Canada was to be portrayed as a warm, welcoming country where things like snow and Red Indians had no place.

Rosenthal arrived in Quebec at the beginning of August 1902. He 'set to work the instant he touched Canadian soil, his first picture depicting the landing of a party of emigrants at Quebec.' (Cutting in Rosenthal Collection, BFI) The whole purpose of the project was indeed to encourage immigration, and Rosenthal set out with three associates, filming the sights as he went—Ontario, the Prairies, and then through the Fraser River Canyon to Vancouver. The films reached Britain early in 1903 and were given a premiere attended by the Canadian High Commissioner; the series (eventually called 'Living Canada') was highly praised. Meanwhile, however, winter had set in and Rosenthal was busy disobeying the CPR's ruling on snow scenes. He was making films like 'Montreal on Skates' (January 1903) and 'Ice Yachting on the St Lawrence'. When spring came, he broke the other rule about filming Indians, with a lengthy version of *Hia-watha*, enacted by members of the Ojibway tribe. Rosenthal seems to have made his debut as a director with this film.

The catalogue enthused: 'Never had actors... such a glorious background. The picture stamps itself indelibly upon the mind of every beholder, a perpetual memory...' Soon after this success, Rosenthal broke the Indian rule again and directed a film (around June) called 'Indians gambling for furs—is it peace or war?'. He directed his last film in Canada, a chase called 'Will the express overtake them', before heading back to Britain.

Rosenthal's most exciting assignment was to follow. Russia and Japan were in dispute over Russia's occupation of Manchuria. In February 1904 Japan attacked Russia's main eastern naval base at Port Arthur. The Russo-Japanese war had begun.

Rosenthal, heading off to film travelogues in Spain, was hurriedly recalled and despatched to the Far East. He arrived in Tokyo to find that no war correspondents were being allowed to travel to the mainland. Most of them found this infuriating (Jack London and Melton Prior in particular), and many did not get to the front at all. The Japanese used the same type of polite censorship that the British found so effective in two world wars, and more recently in the Falklands. Rosenthal was in Japan for several months (joining the Welcome Society of Japan during the time), and his usual patience and geniality seem to have been instrumental, says Will Day, in eventually persuading the Japanese to allow correspondents to go to the front some time in the autumn.

The siege of Port Arthur was a grueling and bloody affair. Russia had built powerful forts, and to capture the town the Japanese had first to take the forts. Massed waves of men hadn't worked—the Russians had simply mown them down with machine-gun fire—so the Japanese resorted to digging trenches or 'saps' right up to the forts and then dynamiting them.

Rosenthal (with a Chinese camera assistant) and three other correspondents had built a hide-out in a narrow gully near the front, which was safe from the intense Russian shelling. Frederic Vil-

liers, who came visiting, said that Rosenthal 'caters for the trio when they have finished the day's labour.' His nickname was 'Rosie', and he 'has the gentleness of the fair sex, unless some outsider steps into the focus of his Bioscope when he is churning out films; then his language belies the sobriquet.'

'Mr Rosenthal,' said the Warwick Catalogue, 'was compelled to enter the firing line and expose himself to many dangers unnecessary to... the Press Artist with the hand camera, who can "snap his views" at long range by means of telephoto lenses, which are not as yet applicable to animated photography.' To film scenes of action, Rosenthal adopted a type of shield used by Japanese soldiers to protect themselves against Russian fire. 'Once a fragment from an exploded shell hit the shield within an inch of my eye-hole, knocking myself, camera and shield over in a heap... On one occasion I took up my station close to a Japanese gun, and spent an hour or more taking photographs of the men as they worked it. When I had finished, I shifted my ground elsewhere, and within twenty minutes a shell from a gun in Port Arthur struck the weapon of which I had been taking pictures... Every man working that gun was instantly killed.' (*Photographic News*, June 1905) On another occasion, a Japanese soldier close to him was wounded: 'He fell forward actually on to the camera, and as no ambulance happened to be near I was forced to unscrew the legs of my tripod and, spreading my overcoat upon them, improvise a stretcher on which we bore him to safety.'

By the end of the year the Japanese, with appalling losses, had managed to capture several of the forts. On New Year's Day 1905 the Russians capitulated. Rosenthal set about obtaining pictures of the forts, and typically he took liberties with the Japanese 'minders'. A. Curtis, correspondent for the *Kobe Herald*, wrote: 'We learnt that R, correspondent of the *Sphere* [Rosenthal was also taking photographs for the *Sphere* newspaper], had accidentally found his way into Port Arthur. Attended by his Chinaman, he had kept to the main road and, after passing a few sentries, found himself in Port Arthur. Unfortunately, just as he was arranging his Bioscope, he

The Shanghai waterfront, photographed by Rosenthal in 1900.





Japanese trenches a mile from Port Arthur: summer, 1904.

was excitedly ordered out of the city by a Japanese staff officer...' (Rosenthal Collection, BFI)

Censorship was rigidly applied throughout the war by both Russians and Japanese, though the latter were rather more polite about it. One condition of allowing Rosenthal to the front was that all films had to be shown at the Japanese Embassy in London before public screening. In addition, as Rosenthal noted later in a *Kine Weekly* article (October, 1908), he was required to report the content of undeveloped films to the censor before despatching them home. 'If it had been found that I had mis-stated the contents of the parcel, I was, according to the terms of my licence, liable to be court-

martialled just like a soldier.' Sometimes subterfuge was used to send films out of the battle zone unreported: '...on one occasion a number of films were wrapped in cabbage heads to escape the vigilant watch kept by the censors of both armies.' (1905 Catalogue)

The Russians were even stricter in their controls than the Japanese. Urban managed to station a cameraman with the Russians (George Rogers, an American), but others were not so fortunate. The Frenchman Mesguich travelled all the way across Siberia to film the Russian troops, but then had his camera confiscated and was sent packing. The result was a higher demand for fakes than ever before, many of them made in France

Japanese observers during the siege of Port Arthur.



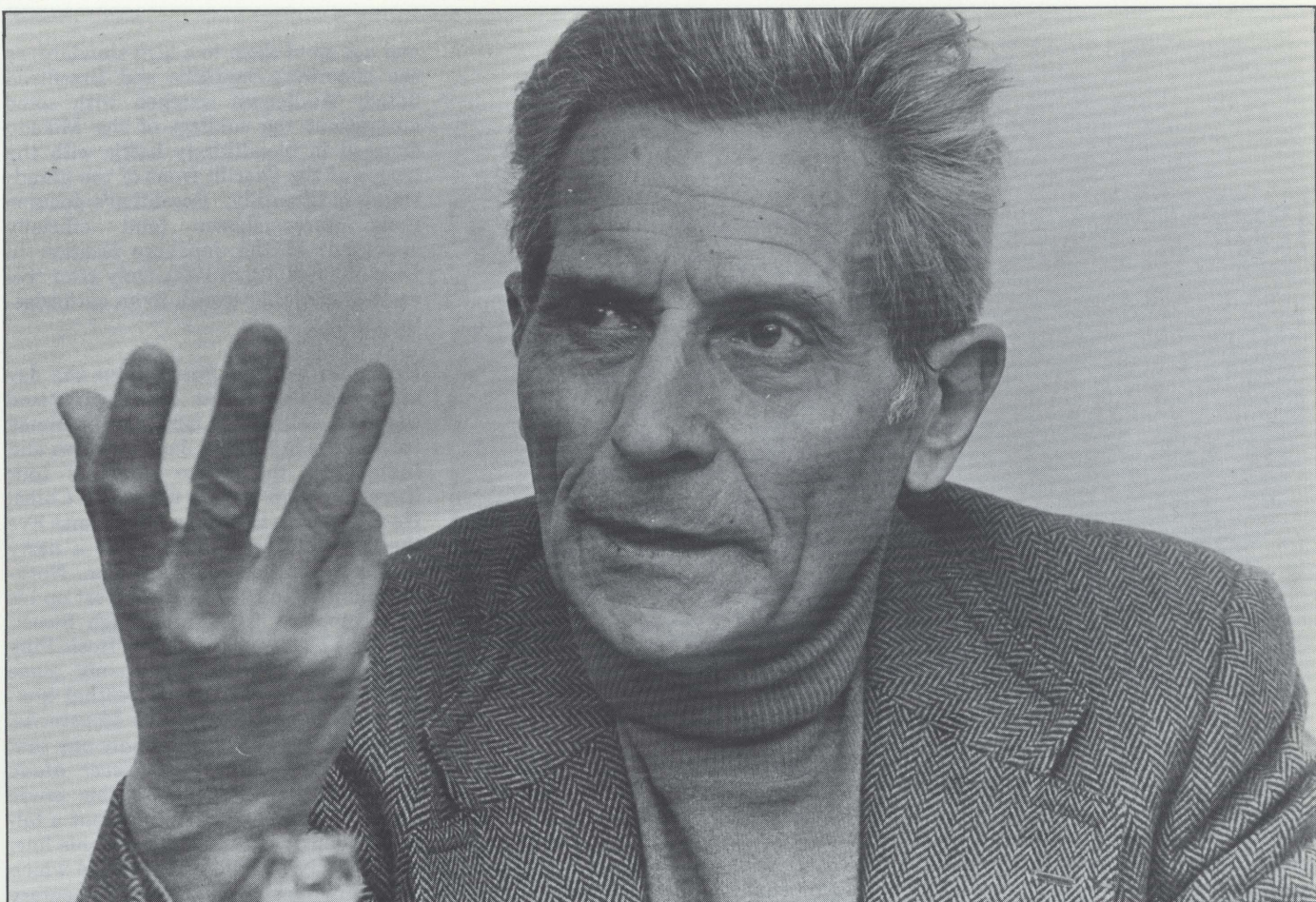
and not all of them to a high standard, as the historians Bardèche and Brasillach noted: 'Audiences watched with some amazement the soldiers of the Mikado engaged in bloodthirsty battle with the troops of the Czar in front of the grandstand at Chantilly.' Rosenthal's genuine films were shown (and officially approved) at the Japanese legation in London on 20 April 1905. Only after this vetting were they shown to an enthusiastic public.

Rosenthal had left Port Arthur the day after Japanese forces officially entered the town. During the next year he filmed travelogues in Borneo, Japan, Burma and India (with the Prince of Wales' tour there). In 1906 he was filming in China. He returned to London on Christmas Eve the following year to be given a nasty shock: Urban had dismissed him. Nothing daunted, in 1908 Rosenthal set up his own company in Croydon High Street, calling it by his nickname, the Rosie Film Company. The company mainly made comic films directed by Rosenthal himself such as *Percy Wanted a Moustache*, *A Would Be Hero* and the only one that survives, *The Man Who Never Made Good*. On the evidence of this crude slapstick effort, Rosenthal was not a talented comedy director. More in his line, and his only film from this period which made an impact, was the documentary *White Sea Fisheries* (1909). In taking it, Rosenthal had to lash himself and his camera to the ship's mast, to avoid being swept overboard. The Rosie Film Company folded in the latter part of 1913.

In the following years Rosenthal undertook various filming assignments: Newfoundland in 1913-14, the Gold Coast in 1916. Towards the end of World War One, Day tells us enigmatically, 'his services were secured by the War Office and he was sent abroad on important staff duties.' His last major project was filming in India and Ceylon in 1922. In his latter years his sight began to fail, and he lived with a niece in Thornton Heath on the proceeds of a pools win and the 'Benevolence of the Film Industry' (Will Day). On 5 March 1946 he died of bronchitis.

Forty years earlier, this pioneer combat cameraman had been a celebrity. He remains one of the few romantic characters of British film history, working at a time when making films was an adventure as well as a job. A *Glasgow Evening News* interview of 1901 summed it up: 'An unpretentious, eye-glassed Cockney, full of wit and humour, carrying on a calling unknown ten years ago or less, and one more vastly interesting and romantic than piracy was when it flourished, or clattering noisily in tin mail to the crusades... He seemed to me to have the most glorious profession in the world.'

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Georges Franju: Behind closed windows

Robert Brown

Last February, Georges Franju overcame his horror of travel and crossed the Channel to attend the NFT retrospective of his work. Now aged 71, Franju had lost none of the intense energy that brands each of his films so strongly. During his visit Robert Brown recorded an interview from which the quotations in this article derive, except where otherwise indicated. The one essential element omitted from the interview could, perhaps, have been communicated only by a work of the film-maker himself: 'Le spectacle,' as Francois Truffaut noted in his introduction to a 1959 *Cahiers du Cinéma* interview, 'La voix de Franju. Le regard de Franju. La présence de Franju.'

●● The 'marvellous' is not the dream, but the dream become reality. You know Baudelaire said: 'The person who looks outside through an open window sees much less than somebody who looks at a closed window.' Of course, if you look through an open window you see what is there. But looking

through a closed window you imagine everything. ●● G.F.

The concluding scene of *Le Dernier Mélodrame* (1978), Georges Franju's most recent feature, provides far and away the most bitter ending to any of his films. A barman in the small provincial

town where a touring theatre company is performing to almost empty houses plans to burn the mobile stage to the ground. His hatred of the theatre is fuelled by protective jealousy of his frustrated wife, who dreams of deserting their barren domestic life for its romantic glamour. Her approaches for employment had, however, been ignored by the actor/manager and his son, who catch her husband trying to set fire to the stage. Forewarned and forearmed with a blank rifle, they shoot at the incendiary. Their 'act' backfires because their victim suffers from a weak heart and dies from the shock of hearing the shot. But his wife makes amends and puts a match to the petrol. From behind a closed window she watches with fierce abstraction as the

theatre-owner mounts the stage for the last time to expire among its burning ruins. The melodramatic clichés of this scene, as described on the page, acquire a tragic dimension through the presence of this single shot of a woman living out her life separated from the world of her imagination (the performance of death) by the screen of the closed window.

●● Melodrama flourished in an era of happiness at the turn of the century. It introduced a sense of misfortune in a happy period. Today we no longer live in a happy period and people's needs are different. Melodrama consists in giving people the sense of drama—making them want a drama to happen. And, as soon as we want a drama, where have our better feelings gone? As soon as we want to protect the unfortunate heroine, we must first want her to be unfortunate. That's why I say melodrama is utter hypocrisy. But I also say that melodrama has its truth. It brings us as close as possible. It was popular because it was sentimental and public. And it ceased to exist when people began referring to playwrights instead of plays. ●● (Film Quarterly, 1981)

The men of the town finally rise up against the theatre when they find its sole clientele to be their own womenfolk. Earlier, Franju delights in showing the interplay that creates a living theatre of contact between performer and spectator. But the dramatic struggles on stage are increasingly perverted by the real-life squabbles engendered by empty lives wasting away in the heavy somnolence of a hot southern summer. As hypocrisy spreads from the stage to the auditorium, so a curtain of fear falls to isolate the townspeople behind the masks of their property. The barman's wife is seen as she sees herself, caught in the void between imagination and reality, between her dream—the theatre—that she has destroyed on account of her imprisoning background, and her existence—provincial domesticity—that she has ruined on behalf of her imaginative desires. Between the two is the screen of the closed window, part mirror and part peephole.

These isolated moments of 'lyrical explosion' are common throughout Franju's work, often in connection with images of solitary women looking through closed windows. Their effect is the result of privileging, not psychological subjectivity, but a formal objectivity founded on the principle of 'concentric circles'. The woman's radio-active abstraction directly reflects two earlier scenes involving Lilette, the actress played by Edith Scob, who is the personification of everything the frustrated wife thinks she would like to be. In the first, Franju's camera captures her entranced in her role as Pierrette blowing a tune on a flute. The tune, the flute, the costume, the actress, Edith Scob—the layers of artifice mirror the depth of the trance. In the second, she is brought rudely face to face with the outside world, her audience, when a shopkeeper refuses to serve her because she is a member of the theatrical troupe. The sense of her shocked dismay is as palpable as her lost rapture, the

pleasure that is bought at the price of pain, the enmity of the shopkeeper opposed to the secret pride of the artist.

It is these two emotions that are principally reflected in the woman's eyes by the closed window. And it is this sense of direct physical contact and of an objective vision that can break through behind the closed window of the screen to a material reality and a lived world of experience beyond convention that makes Franju's *oeuvre* a particularly important one in modern cinema. In this context, one should be careful to distinguish it from the equally remarkable work of Jean Cocteau, for whom the cinema was in itself almost a vision of living death. Cocteau's films about the nature of legend revealed the Death-in-Life. Franju's films about the world of the imagination uncover the Life-in-Death. As he said about one of his features, 'I want to bring the void to life.' There is, so to speak, no fictional representation without taxation of actuality. What he has filmed becomes present on the screen only through the presence of the spectator; the anguish of absence latent in each Franju image materialises in its projection to the viewer, separated from the action on the screen by time and space.

●● Any screen image has an immediate presence. Whatever you do, a film is always in the present tense. The past is spontaneously re-actualised by the spectator. Dreams, poetry, the fantastic must emerge from reality itself. Every film is a documentary, even the most poetic. There is no mystique in my films. Whoever talks of mystique talks about the presence of something; the presence of God. By contrast, what is bizarre is precisely what makes us afraid. And that is absence, the unknown, the void, the void haunted by anguish. But only by anguish, by nothing else. Here, there is no way out. People say that a mask is mysterious. Not at all, it recovers a mystery, but it is not mysterious. What is mysterious is the face discovered. ●●

The enigmatic ending to *Le Dernier Mélodrame* documents the fragmentation of a community whose hypocrisies had been its justification. The search for new forms of communicating energy which would be as public and affecting but not as hypocritical as the theatrical melodrama is what Franju's cinema attempts. The problem indirectly faced is that to communicate via the screen is to communicate with a passive and solitary spectator and not an assembly of active participants. The epiphanies which conclude all Franju's other films make it clear that he believes it is only through appealing to the imagination of the individual that he can be freed into the physical space outside the two cell-windows of his eyes. The revelation of social hypocrisy can only be justified by the search for a more truthful justice, one which has only one law, the Law of Contact. In his essay 'Realism and Surrealism', Franju wrote:

●● For Kyrö, all that is poetic is surrealist. And when I claim that everything poetic is realistic, the difference between us is not a matter of 'form', but of terms. Buñuel once said: 'In all films, good or bad, beyond and in spite of the director's intentions, the poetry of cinema struggles to come to the surface and show itself.' Does not that mean that poetry is in reality, in the very life of the films, and that it is less a matter of expressing it than of not preventing it from showing itself? ●●

Any attempt to illustrate this concept in Franju's actual work must pall beside the breathtaking analysis by Jean-Luc Godard of his first feature, *La Tête contre les Murs* (1959). The film concerns a rebellious youth, Gêrâne, committed to an asylum by his tyrannical father. He escapes to find the girl who has been visiting him, Stéphanie, only to discover that his 'love' is another trap by which the authorities can ensnare him back to the asylum. Godard wrote: 'Franju's performers do not act, they quiver... Franju decomposes. Decomposition

Le Dernier Mélodrame: the actor-manager (Michel Vitold) dies on stage.



becomes the tiny, incisive gesture with which Mocky [Gérane] unbuckles Anouk Aimée's [Stéphanie's] belt and which is the more effective in that it remains framed in medium shot; a single gesture lasting three seconds, and a whole five minute scene is impregnated by it, justified and dramatically scored by it. And this, moreover, is Franju's art, directing, making a film, writing a scenario, to turn the camera's gaze on faces and objects long enough to brand them deeply... Franju seeks the bizarre at all costs, because the bizarre is a convention and behind this convention one must also discover a basic truth. He seeks the madness behind reality because it is for him the only way to rediscover the true face of reality behind the madness. That is why with each close-up one has the feeling that the camera wipes these faces, as Veronica's handkerchief wiped the face of Our Lord, because Franju seeks and finds classicism behind romanticism. In more modern terms, let us say that Franju demonstrates the necessity of Surrealism if one considers it a pilgrimage to the sources.'

The final scene of *Le Dernier Mélodrame* is the exception that proves the rule about Franju's endings; every previous Franju film ends on a hopeful note of exhausted liberation. But this sense of freedom and reconciliation is itself surrounded by a bitterly ironic detachment as if to signify, like the 'END' title that grows out of the image and the opening iris-in, that making or watching a film can itself lead the unsuspecting into freshly created traps. The possibility of finding freedom and tenderness exists only in direct proportion to the possibility of being ensnared in the search. In *Hôtel des Invalides*, his documentary on the Paris military museum, the final sequence shows a group of war orphans leaving the Invalides for the open street beyond, which itself holds no particular promise or hope. As they chant 'And the white dove sings day and night', the image cuts to a flock of pigeons flying away from a military monument towards the empty sky.

In *La Première Nuit*, the lost boy emerges at dawn from the Métro in which he has been trapped overnight and where his dream girl has vanished and wanders aimlessly through a tree-filled park. In *Les Yeux sans Visage*, Christiane leaves the father she has killed and the hospital of horror in which he had imprisoned her for the sole available escape route—madness. The eponymous heroine of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* finally escapes her family's provincial prison for the liberating solitude of city life. The fictional Thomas who is the real *Thomas l'Imposteur*, caught like all Cocteau's heroes in the no-man's-land between life and death, achieves final release in death, while the real Thomas who is a fictional character in a novel only dreams he is dying. Cocteau's epigraph reads, 'In him, fiction and reality became one.'

In *Judex*, the hero liberates a dove at the same time that the plot releases the female hostage whom he himself has been seeking in vain to free. As they walk arm

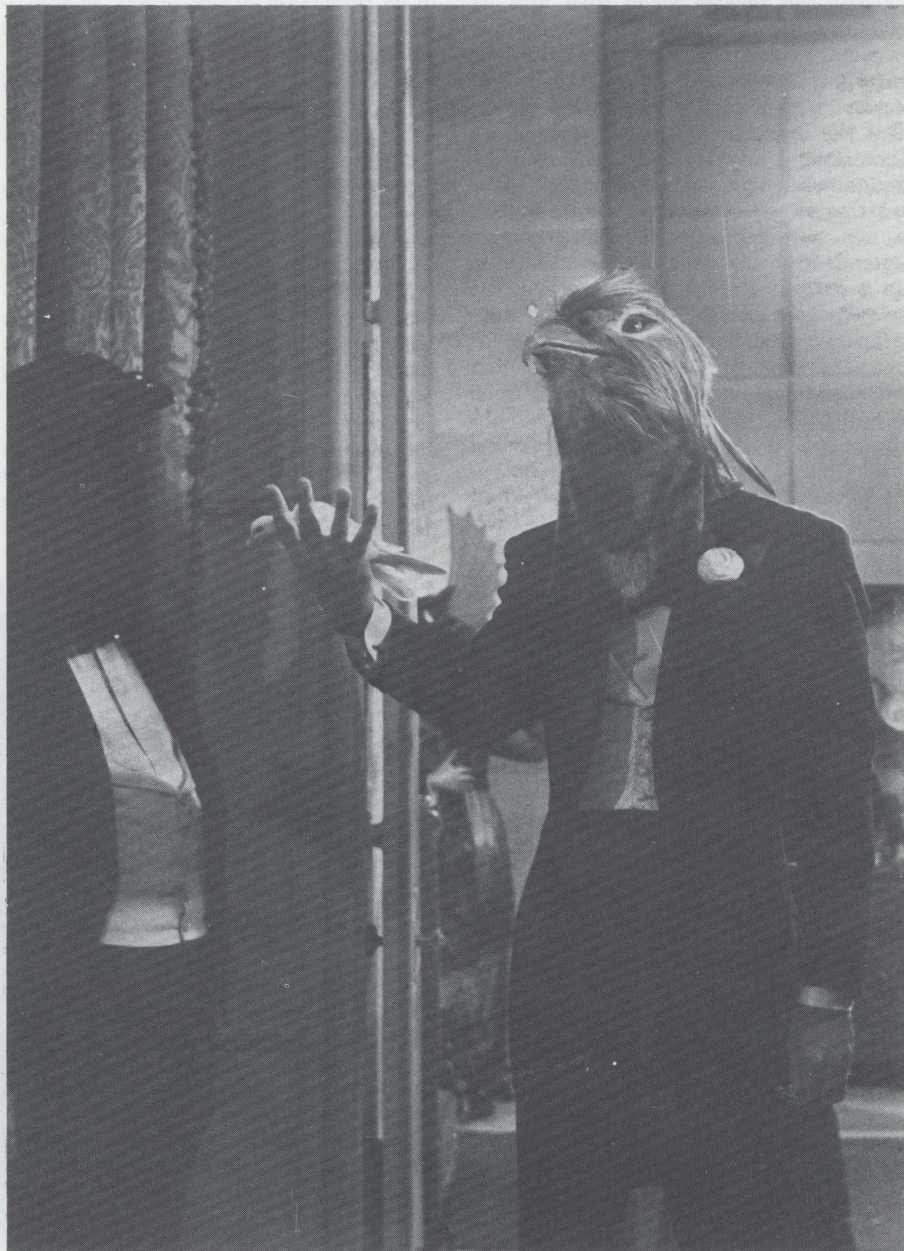
in arm along a beach, a superimposed caption reads, '1914—an epoch which was not in the least happy.' The monk in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* finally metamorphoses the holy image of the Virgin into that of the girl whom he has abandoned on account of his faith. Like the barge at the end of Vigo's *L'Atalante*, these images of reconciliation are deeply enigmatic. Their effect of liberation and tenderness derives from Franju's recognition of freedom as the potentiality of solitude, madness and poetry, but not of happiness. Freedom clearly does not mean freedom from anguish for a filmmaker who describes himself as an 'active pessimist'.

●● If there wasn't the search for liberty, if there were only happy films, nothing would be happening. Because if, for example, one could only show a Thérèse [Desqueyroux] for whom everything was fine, if there are no impediments to liberty, then there would be no psychology. If one talks of psychology, one talks of conflict. A character who is completely transparent and completely visible like that is not interesting. In every case,

nothing can replace psychology. If Thérèse wasn't a character with complexes, she wouldn't be Thérèse and there would be no novel. Everything is there in the book. One cannot put oneself, being oneself, in the place of another, and especially when that other is a character in a novel. I mean, the 'poupou' [young girl], as such, is a character I much like in the novelist's schema and which I enjoy placing in the film-maker's schema. It is solely like that one must see her. She is a character in a novel. The film is a documentary about a character in a novel. I was accused of not considering the profoundly Christian spirit of the book. It's true, I considered the spirit of Mauriac, but not his spirituality.●●

The single most crucial characteristic of all Franju's films may be that they are documentaries about a pre-existing fiction. This article's central concern, perhaps, is to establish the status of that fiction. Is it Nature or is it Convention? Or are they always the same thing? His feature films are nearly all screenplay adaptations of novels while his documentaries are, without exception, commis-

Channing Pollock in *Judex*: '... nothing but a presence.'



sioned projects. He has said, 'I believe a commission is as useful to a documentary film-maker as a wall is to a fresco painter.' He might easily have extended the parallel to novels and feature film-makers. The fiction that pre-exists the film, then, is neither the film-making apparatus nor the institution nor story about which the film is being made, since they already exist in reality. It is the abstractions on which they are both founded. The abstraction of film is the arbitrary distinction between fiction and document (and *not* between fantasy and reality), while that of the institution or story is its own myth-making. Franju's documentaries are not attacks on the institutions of the army, the church, the law and science, as such, but on their professional mythologies—glory, faith, right, duty, progress, etc.

It is altogether too facile to equate Franju's anti-institutionalism with his humanism. Why, if that were the case, are all his heroes and heroines respectively trapped either in their own heresies or their own minds? Wherein, after all, Franju seems to be asking, lies the difference? If Edith Scob, the magical victim who always escapes the closure of the narrative, represents one pole, then Pierre Brasseur, the ugly oppressor who initiates the story, represents the other. In both *La Tête contre les Murs* and *Les Yeux sans Visage*, Brasseur, the man in charge of the asylum and the hospital respectively, is shown to be as much a victim of his own institutions as Gérane, his patient, or Christiane, his daughter. After ruining his daughter's looks in a car accident, he kills attractive women in order to perform skin grafts on her face. 'Family love' between father and daughter in *Les Yeux sans Visage* is as much a trap as the hatred between father and son in *La Tête contre les Murs*. Tenderness without freedom is no more tender than freedom without tenderness is free.

Indeed, Franju shows no particular sympathy or interest in the more

enlightened doctrines of Brasseur's rival psychiatrist in *La Tête contre les Murs*. The rival's faith in progress is no less oppressive than Brasseur's faith in duty. The safe liberal consensus of sensitive individualism is no improvement on the equally safe radical consensus of solipsistic nihilism. The tragedy lies in a humanity that believes in 'love' as a paranoid necessity rather than an imaginative possibility. The fear of love and the love of fear that institutions like the family foster but do not necessarily create since, without them, humanity feels lost, is described most succinctly in a comment Franju made about *La Tête contre les Murs*:

●● Above all, it's the social question. The fact that the mental patient has always been considered by public opinion as dangerous, that madness is considered like the pox once was, as shameful. The demonstration of public opinion is, in the film, the hunter's rifle shot which shoots down the escaped madman. The warders, the straitjackets and the walls which enclose the insane, who create fear, are hallowed like the army and the police. ●● (Georges Franju by Gabriel Vialle)

Like Fritz Lang, Franju seeks and finds the darker laws of life which underpin social convention. He legislates for a poetic justice aimed not at our protection, but at our liberation from the natural fear of fear that causes an imprisonment of 'truth' behind the bars of convention.

However, most critics do persist in equating Franju's assaults on institutional life with a humanist view of the individual's isolation from society. Gabriel Vialle in both his books on the director is particularly prone to oversimplify Franju's original taste for the bizarre as being purely rooted in an anarchist overthrow of all convention, although Raymond Durgnat also succumbs occasionally in his otherwise excellent *Franju*. Durgnat insists that the film-maker's interest in victims and

suffering combined with his fetishisation of innocence (his 'poupous') represents a revolutionary pessimism. But even he has to admit when writing about *Thomas l'Imposteur* that 'the film Franju hasn't yet made is the story of a male equivalent of the Princess, the story of a deserter, of a man who withdraws himself from a war for no other reason than that he doesn't care who wins and finds his own side just as dangerous as the other.'

Unlike most of Franju's heroines, the Princess attains knowledge 'without dying, through that identification with victims which is the root and crux of Franju's art.' But, as Durgnat notes, the Princess progressively fades away from Cocteau's narrative in direct relation to its gradual decomposition. Franju's eye stays on Thomas because he is the embodiment of that decomposition. By the end, Thomas has metamorphosed from being a creature of his own imagination into a veritable ghost. The conventions of theatre which bind Thomas are the conventions of war that he seeks and then dies from. Durgnat argues that Franju's prime concern for victims is to make the viewer share the outrage perpetrated on them by social institutions and their mythologies, such as war. After his own harrowing experience in filming inside an asylum for *La Tête contre les Murs* Franju remarked, 'When I have to deal with a sick person, I become tender and not at all sadistic, not that there's the least difference anyway.' Franju's tenderness to be cruel and his cruelty to be tender betrays an artistic personality deeply split between solipsism and commitment, between uprooting social hypocrisy yet, at the same time, maintaining social contact between individuals.

By way of contrast to Vialle and, to a lesser extent, Durgnat, the distinguished French critic Henri Agel believes that *Le Sang des Bêtes*, Franju's documentary about the abattoirs of Paris, is not so much a 'cry of revolt or a solemn warning but the statement of a condemned man ... It is not so much the human condition as the very essence of life that troubles him. Franju would thus be much more Hindu than Western.' When Agel also writes, 'Like Buñuel and Vigo, Franju has touched the wood of the Cross,' Vialle is unsparing in his scorn. 'It recalls Franju's story of the old woman, a neighbour of the film-maker, who, after seeing *Notre Dame, Cathédrale de Paris*, declared to the director's wife, "Ah, Madame. How beautiful, all those empty chairs, one can sense that Monsieur Franju is a devout Catholic, one understands that he is saying, Look at those empty seats, where thousands of believers will come to pray".' It is worth recording Franju's own reaction to his wife's report: 'The Catholics, they have some imagination, don't they?' It is not surprising, in this context, to find Bazin, himself a Catholic and a 'psychologue', writing about *Hôtel des Invalides* as follows: 'Some have accused Franju of wronging the State and betraying his subject in a sacrilegious manner. But ... nowhere has he betrayed his subject, he

Thomas l'Imposteur.



has only treated it in depth. The horror which is emitted is completely objective (apart from several surrealistic flourishes which are justly the film's weaknesses). His position is simple: it was necessary for a reportage to deal not only with the objective content of the Hôtel des Invalides, but also with its subjective and moral content.'

Bazin's words recall Godard's critique—'Franju seeks the bizarre at all costs, because the bizarre is a convention and behind this convention one must also discover a basic truth... Franju demonstrates the necessity of Surrealism if one considers it a pilgrimage to the sources.' In many ways, the cinema seems to be for Franju what the mirror is for Orphée; they both show reality as 'death at work'. Cinema is the 'open sesame' to the world of the bizarre because it uncovers the million little deaths suffered but concealed afresh each moment the ball is thrown on to the roulette wheel of Time and Space. Each shot is an unveiling of the moment. And it is significant that his symbolic world is almost exclusively derived from the animal kingdom. Whether it be the dogs of war or the doves of peace that roam land and sky, Nature itself furnishes the iconic sources of madness. Franju's undisguised love of children is born of respect for their spontaneous vision of Nature as not a mysterious but a very material world of fantastic shapes.

When he made a film specifically about the forces of nature, *La Faute de l'Abbé*

Mouret, he wanted to clothe the natural elements in artificial decor. One reason why he remains unhappy with the film is that he was not able to shoot the scenes of Paradise in the studio. His original idea was to construct Nature as a world that was no less enclosed and imprisoning than the monastery to which the monk returns after his 'false idyll'. Nature itself is a dark convention whose truth only the light of objective vision can penetrate. As Durgnat astutely remarks: 'In Franju, the pure "seeing" is linked to the processes of reality; what is lost is interior convention, not the outside world.' Durgnat's 'processes of reality' may refer to the institutionalisation of life into conventions which, for Franju, is the fantastic. The fantastic and the bizarre are these 'voids haunted by anguish'. And, if what is lost is only interior convention, then the individual human being can find freedom only through solitude, madness or poetry. Franju's cinema represents a 'pilgrimage to the sources' which even a film director cannot control.

●● When I made short films, they were already writing things like 'Georges Franju or the different ways of envisaging death'. Already it was a true document of death. That's got nothing to do with mystery. People believe mystery creates anguish. But it is anguish that creates mystery. If I show something it's because I am anguished about it. And that's why I've always made my short films on subjects which I fear. I made *Le Sang*

des Bêtes because I am horrified by blood. The only way to affect the viewers is to affect them in the same way you have been. To do what I did, I had to be naive, to be sure of myself. Right at the start of my career, I wasn't thinking terribly much about making cinema but about making a film on the abattoirs of Paris because I know the area around them. And it was through the environment that I was led to want to make a film on what was at the centre of that environment, that is, the abattoirs of La Villette and Vaugirard. I did the opposite of what was usual. Instead of poeticising a place which wasn't poetic, I wanted to restore under a strictly documentary form the sombre poetry of the abattoirs and the wasteland area round them. In the studio, one tries to make natural what is artificial. Here, on location, in natural decor, I tried to restore to the open world its artistic clothing, its theatrical design.

The bizarre is not a matter of choice. It is a matter of discovery. One can't say 'I'm going to create the bizarre.' One sees it. The boat which cuts the wasteland in two—it is more a boat than if it were seen in the water, that's the bizarre. Why? Because I wanted to film some boats and I then fell to the ground by accident. There I saw a boat which cut the wasteland in two and I said to myself, 'There, that's how I'm going to show the boat.' That is not created, it is discovered, whereas the fantastic is created. It has nothing to do with inspiration. It's chance. It's simply using difficulties and treating or expressing them beneficially. The bizarre is the blood of the beasts steaming in the fog. But neither the fog nor the steaming blood was created. It is always

Closed windows: Emmanuelle Riva in *Thérèse Desqueux*.



documentary, realist. There are houses by the railway station which are strange because they are so narrow that one wonders how anyone can live in them. Cocteau described them to me as 'ces maisons funestes'.

Perhaps it is my Breton nature that gives me my mystical aspect. If I have a mystical side, it is to believe not in God but in ghosts. I never search, I find. I have a horror of research. If I don't see it, too bad. But if I see it, it exists. . . . For example, I wouldn't have made *Thérèse Desqueyroux* if I hadn't known Emmanuelle Riva. And *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*. I'd wanted to make it for twenty-five years. I had suggested it to Gérard Philipe at the time when priests still had great authority. But I had a lot of trouble, and it would have worked much better if I had made it then than when I finally made it much later. There was no Gérard Philipe and, obviously, everything had been liberalised. . . . You see, with *Judex*, *Judex* is nothing but a presence and Channing Pollock who plays him possessed that presence. ●●

Judex is probably the key film in critical and public assessment of Franju's oeuvre, the one that most divides opinion. For admirers, *Judex* is Franju's quintessential masterpiece. For his sympathisers (he has no detractors), it is only a charming *jeu d'esprit*, the reception generally accorded his most recent masterpiece *Le Dernier Mélodrame*. Undoubtedly, the existentialist cinema of Rivette and Ruiz, if not also of de Gregorio, owes this one film more than a debt or two. Cocteau, Buñuel, Vigo, Fellini, Feuillade, Lang, Murnau, Dreyer, even Carné meet together with Henry James, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Boileau and Narcejac, Breton, Baudelaire, Kafka, Proust and, of course, Souvestre in a poet's paradise that has become the real world.

Objectively subjective and morally horrendous (and vice versa), *Judex* tells the document and documents the tale of a child growing up and discovering that the adult world is a faraway place where dreams have become reality. The anguish derives from the real locations and real performers that are unable to exist in any other story. The point, as Durgnat again perceives, is that these people and places are existing in 1967 and pretending to exist in 1914. It is a film in the negative subjunctive—the very condition of viewing cinema. The clearest manifestation of this effect is the phone receiving 'dead voices': Edith Scob listens to her 'dead' father's voice (whereas, in *Les Yeux sans Visage*, her ghost listened to her 'living' fiancé's voice). In contrast to *Orphée*, where the poet listens to the dead voices of the 'talking car', the dream figures of *Judex* try to communicate with the living. Both *Judex* and *Orphée*, however, are about demiurges becoming men, about fiction becoming documentary, about Supermen failing to be heroes and becoming ordinary husbands with loving and devoted wives. But where Cocteau concludes with the Princess's torture (the agony of immortality), Franju refers to a finite and specific epoch in history that is 'not at all happy'.

L'Homme sans Visage is, like all

Franju films, but more so than most, a very black comedy about the period in which it was made. As we watch a minor character await a train's departure which we know will also signify his own departure from life, we observe his movements as a ritual preparation for death; the sitting down in the seat, the glancing out of the window, the looking at his watch and the unfolding of a newspaper. The absurd twists of a plot about a vast international conspiracy hold centre-frame, yet Franju's interest is clearly focused at the edge of frame on the minor characters. As the story spirals round and round to involve more and more places and people in increasingly unlikely situations, one understands that this international co-production shot for 16mm television serialisation and 35mm film release is designed to show the modern entertainments industry as a conspiracy against the little man.

The disillusionment underlying the unusually passive despair of *L'Homme sans Visage* finds its fullest expression in Franju's next feature, *Le Dernier Mélodrame*. It was made for television, and Franju has seen all his subsequent private projects come to nothing, although he has done contract work for television—for example, *The Shadow Line*, from a Conrad story. The disenchantment that previously could still nourish his art seems to have grown to resigned despair. He refused to talk about his next project which, he said, 'is very clear in my mind, but I can't see how it will be made.' It is impossible not to detect a bitterness born of a sense of cultural isolation. His disagreements with Jack Lang, the French Culture Minister who controls an almost private film fund, are well known and, in particular, he cannot have been pleased with the Minister's decision to finance Wajda to direct *Danton* (both Franju and Wajda recently made television adaptations of *The Shadow Line*).

There is nothing manichean in Franju's work, but one senses that the precarious balance between the 'natural' and 'social'

worlds that makes him such a close cinematic relation to Vigo has finally collapsed and forced him into an increasingly isolated position. The pity of this is that Franju's basic *parti pris* is very close, because it is the exact inverse, to that of a film-maker like Godard. The latter's search for new forms of communication to replace the old bears the same passionate stamp as Fritz Lang's search for energy, to which Franju is another close heir, as his 1937 article 'The Style of Fritz Lang' testifies:

●● The spiritual work of Lang shows one primary aim: the search for energy. The extremity in the attitude, the fundamental energy in the expression, the nervousness in the gesture are the bases on which Lang's system of meaning rests. It demands from its material a certain power, either radio-active or passive. For Lang, indeed, acting is not directed inwards, but outwards. The cinema being less an art of exteriorisation than of the exterior, it is unimportant whether a performance is sincere as long as it is true, but true absolutely. . . . this piece could have been entitled 'Les nerfs à bout'. ●●

The search for energy is transmuted by Franju into a search for natural justice and social contact. But, as Godard has demonstrated, the objective vision and the subjective emotion are ultimately irreconcilable unless a third term between the two can be constructed. If Franju—mystical materialist, romantic classicist, surreal realist—seems today a peculiarly modern master, it is because he has divorced each term from its conventional significance. In 1959 Godard wrote, 'It is true that *La Tête contre les Murs* is cinema of the past. But who can say that the cinema of the past, if not today's, will not be that of tomorrow?' The answer to his question may be, those people who believe that there is, to some degree, an 'equal' sign between Godard's 'return to zero' and Franju's 'pilgrimage to the sources.'

Thanks to Michelle Snapes for translation of the quotations from Georges Franju.

Pilgrimage to the sources: Franju's 1953 documentary *Le Grand Méliès*.



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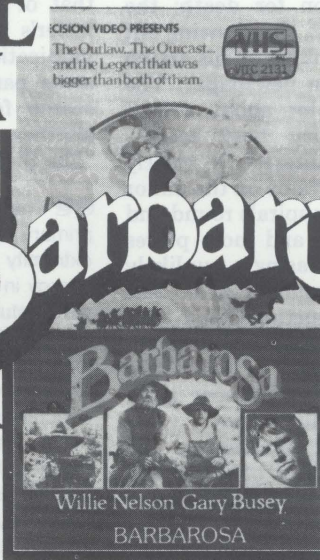
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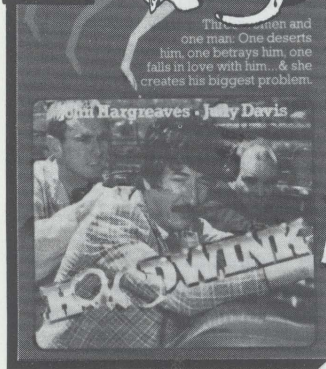
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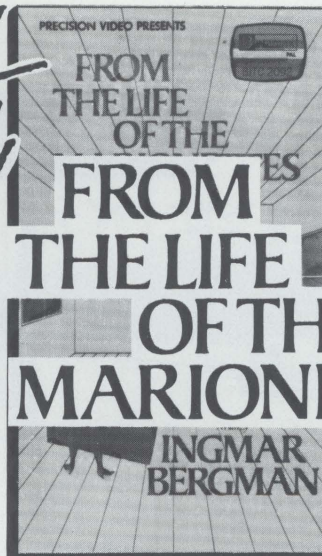
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AT THE END of his life, Count Tolstoy, a great and wealthy man, took flight from his estate, from what he had made himself and from what the world had made him. He fell ill at a railway station; and there is a fragment of film—praise the archivist!—of Mme Tolstoy, who had gone in pursuit dressed in a manner befitting the wife of a great man (even one who affected peasant smocks), progressing with stately dignity along the station platform. She enters the room where Tolstoy is confined and the door closes behind her. What passed between her and the vexed dying novelist? What words of consolation or reprobation? We shall never know. But, as the door closed on the enterprising stranger cranking his camera, the mystery was fixed. The spec-

tator's curiosity had been perpetually aroused.

The title is unambiguous: *L'Argent*, plain and simple. *Le Diable*, *probablement* suggested metaphysical hanky panky: the meaning of the title was only revealed, if at all, in a half-heard almost deliberately thrown-away moment towards the end of the film. *L'Argent*, a modern, rigorous, predetermined moral tale, which uses as its starting point a Tolstoy story, 'The False Note', proceeds with a surety of footing which, right from the credit sequence (Parisian street noises, the hissing closure of the stainless steel lid of an outdoor cash-dispenser), belies the seventy-odd years of its maker, Robert Bresson. Although, as one would expect,

the theme is other-worldly, the manner in which Bresson develops it reveals no flight from present-day realities or, indeed, from the course which down the years he has set himself.

Le Diable, *probablement* (1977) was set in the faintly ethereal world of yesterday's Parisian dropouts. Superannuated hippies lolled beside the Seine strumming their guitars. The narrative touched on one matter, ecology, which had just missed its moment. 'L'argent', on the other hand, is today's subject: the recession, European, worldwide, has for some time been biting home; what is perhaps more relevant is that we all now feel the pressure. For many people, from all walks of life, living on credit is no longer sinful, indeed has become an accepted means of

Madame Tolstoy and the Axeman

John Pym



survival. The sliding, ever-ready cash-dispenser is a potent symbol.

In other small matters, Bresson reminds us of the historical moment in which his adaptation of a nineteenth century Russian story occurs. His protagonist, Yvon, earns his living, at the start, by driving a small tanker, dispensing domestic diesel fuel. Early on Bresson shows us in detail—the hand in its industrial rubber glove, the self-retracting hose, the cap on the tank—exactly what Yvon does. We are reminded that this is the Oil Age: that the cost of oil is one of the determining factors in the economy of every developed country. The film's soundtrack is punctuated by cars revving: the consumers of oil. Our attention is drawn to characters whirring about on *mobylettes*: pedal-power is, of course, no longer sufficient for today's youngster. Instead of stowing away bicycle clips in one's school desk, the crash helmet is placed on top of it.

If one tried to isolate a single image which summed up *Le Diable, probablement*, one might come up with the interior of Notre Dame. The dominant image of *L'Argent* is perhaps the glass and steel camera shop to which Yvon makes a delivery of oil and where his road to ruin begins. The shop, its till, its layout, the cameras it sells, the boxes in which they come, the glazed cabinets, fix the period, the city, the mood, in a way more strikingly than the film's timeless Bressonian locations, the court, the prison, the village house. Furthermore, the actual detailing of the images, the manner in which money is extracted from expensive wallets, prisoners are unloaded from prison vans (handcuffed and each led, like dogs, by an individual policeman), how a brandy bottle is hidden in a prison mattress, invests the story with a striking immediacy.

What then in the story itself so distinguishes *L'Argent*? It is plain in the way that, say, Chaucer's 'Pardoner's Tale' is plain. It exists not for itself but for what we are to learn from it. It is told with vivid simplicity in 84 minutes, as though there were other pilgrims waiting their

turn. A boy is denied extra pocket money by his father: he has debts at school. A friend produces a forged 500-franc note (a number have been circulating in Paris): they defy a woman assistant at the camera shop not to accept it after she suspects it may be a fake. The woman's boss later reprimands her, and promptly hands it and two other forged notes on to the absolutely innocent Yvon. The forged money passes from hand to hand like a hot potato; and in the beginning one marvels at Bresson's skill in not wasting time—the old studio skill of trimming and retrimming, or perhaps of editing before not after shooting.

The narrative itself is not faultless. The logical progression of the innocent's downfall is at one point at least rather shaky. Yvon does not pass on the forged notes. He offers one in payment for his lunch, only to be told, peremptorily, that it is a fake; he then produces the other two in an attempt to prove his innocence. What, one might ask, is he doing paying for his lunch with, as it were, the morning's takings? He should, surely, have paid with his wages. But this aside, his downfall is sure and inescapable. He is had up for passing the forged notes, having failed to convince the police that the camera shop was to blame; subsequently loses his job; takes the job of wheel-man in an abortive bank robbery (and here Bresson impishly turns a trusted convention on its head); is sent to prison; finds himself before the governor for threatening a prison officer; attempts suicide in solitary confinement ... on top of which his wife has left him and their infant daughter has died. As long ago as *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, Bresson proved himself a master of old-fashioned narrative pace. He has not lost his touch; and he can still deal the cards at speed.

We shall consider the end of the story in a moment. But let's examine why it moves to its climax with such fluidity, what in part accounts for its uniqueness. The film is patterned with visual correspondences, an old Bressonian custom: we cut from door handle to door handle

(this world is all of a piece, the door handle of the camera shop is in essence no different from the highly polished brass door bar inside the prison); from car number plates to cash dispenser codes (a world of meaningless numbers, in themselves as valueless as the forged 500-franc note). There are, too, the performances. The familiar complaint that the players are not players at all, that they move like puppets, gaze at the floor (it has been said they gaze at the chalk marks), deliver their lines in a monotone, is heard again. But it is, with one or two exceptions, as untrue as it is beside the point. The stillness, if it needs to be reiterated, is part of the point. The Biblical figures—calm, unknowable, 'expressionless'—in the paintings of Piero Della Francesca give nothing away. If they could move, they would probably look at the ground. They are part—and again it seems an elementary point—of the design: agents of the moral. They are, to be sure, not Hawksian achievers (and I once heard a distinguished critic expostulate in blind fury in a crowded foyer at what he took to be the insufferable spinelessness of the youngsters in *Le Diable, probablement*), but they have for the most part a luminous, 'Bressonian' expressiveness which at times is as capable of exciting pity as Greta Garbo's Marguerite is capable of moving the susceptible to tears.

Bresson's method of address is, of course, familiar: the 'non-performances', the correspondences, the singular pattern of shots which focus on the middle third of his characters' bodies, the love of the human hand. He has the habit too of interjecting startling moments of violence, which have the effect of breaking the fluidity. In *L'Argent*, there are three violent moments (a fourth is, in a way, all the more shocking for not being shown) which match each other and signpost the film's moral. (They are also executed with a breathtaking command of what can be achieved with the minimum of time, shots and movement within the frame. One recalls, in this respect, Joan's interminable trial, the sameness of

A school debt: the fateful note.



The note refused: Yvon (Christian Patey) in the bistro.



her entry, day after day, into the courtroom, the tedium which concealed the horror of her coming martyrdom: then nothing, the charred stake.)

As if to draw attention to the three moments of violence, Bresson avoids showing us another potential one, the bank robbery. We see crouching armed policemen and one of the robbers with a gun to a hostage's head. But that's all. To be sure, the sequence concludes with a car chase but this ends, after a lot of engine noise and a long-held shot of Yvon's foot on the accelerator, with a conventional smash-up—the sort of melodramatic moment Bresson parodied with loving fidelity in the film within a film in *Quatre nuits d'un rêveur*. This advances the action. When, however, Yvon impulsively attacks the man who has refused the forged note in payment for his lunch (the man's jacket is suddenly seized; the next second a table is overturned; a glass broken; the tablecloth slowly detaches itself from the tabletop), a moment of action reveals a human reaction. The response to injustice is anger; but on another level, Yvon's minor assault is merely an occurrence. His second outburst takes place in the prison dining hall. Piqued by a fellow-prisoner, he seizes a serving utensil; a prison officer intervenes, Yvon raises the weapon and then, realising the futility of the gesture, shoots it along the stone floor. Again an understandable response to provocation, again simply an occurrence: in the split second that the utensil was lifted, it might have gone either way—and how would Yvon's guilt have been judged, this young man from whom fate had taken everything and to whom it had given nothing? It is time to consider Mme Tolstoy's closed door.

We have watched the progress along the station platform, now comes the moment when the door is closed in our faces. Money, Bresson suggests with a bold simplicity which arouses one's suspicion that this is not what he is really getting at, is the great corrupter: greed leads to debt, leads to deceit, leads to dishonesty,

leads to the downfall of the innocent. Yvon plummets just as surely as the three men in 'The Pardoner's Tale' who, seeking Death in a time of plague, find a pot of gold beneath a tree and are thus destined to kill each other in their purblind greed. But that's not all.

The mystery is this. When Yvon is released from prison, he kills a hotelier and his wife. (We are momentarily taken off guard: he washes blood from his hands, carefully wraps up his soiled trousers... what can have occurred?) He then falls in with a simple saintly woman, who cares for a crippled nephew, his out of sorts parents and an ingrate father. She takes him in, a stranger, and listens to his confession of murder. She feeds him. She expects nothing from life. He picks a handful of cobnuts, gives her one, helps her hang up the laundry. It is impossible to describe the sublime beauty of this sequence, this epiphanous moment when the woman and the young man suddenly find themselves in harmony; just as it is impossible to convey in writing the effect of the lighted *bateau mouche* gliding at night along the Seine watched in wonderment by the Dreamer and the girl he will lose. I was reminded, ironically, by the shot of Yvon's hand plucking the nuts, of the grandfather in Dovzhenko's *Earth* affirming the wholeness of his life by picking an apple and biting into it. But for Bresson, of course, there is no wholeness on Earth.

One night, Yvon, crazed, one might say, by the desire for money, axes to death the woman's family and the woman herself. It is an obscene injustice. She is tolerant, charitable, uncomplaining, hard working. Carrying a bowl of coffee one morning to the sleeping Yvon, she meets her querulous father who slaps her for her foolishness at having taken in the boy: the coffee scalds her hand, but she says not a word. Bresson is fearless in laying on the detail. Any other director who introduced a crippled child to demonstrate such a woman's saintliness would have laid himself open to disbelieving ridicule. But here, after his introduction (and the purpose of this is

plain), the boy is only occasionally seen. Finally, he lies helpless in bed: we are asked to contemplate his impending death for a moment or two. This death, which we do not see, is in imagination even more monstrous than that of the woman. Confronting the woman, Yvon swings back the axe as he swung back the serving utensil: for a second matters could go either way, then the axe knocks over the bedside light and blood spatters the wall. It occurs. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. Yvon goes to a crowded, noisy café (and Bresson's knack of changing mood and place to maximum effect works here with extraordinary power), takes a steadying brandy, and surrenders himself to the police. His confession spills out. One is left with the unmistakable impression that he has saved himself.

How can this be? The crippled boy, the saintly woman hacked to death, the whole family massacred, not to mention the hotelier and his wife. In the case of the woman's family, only the dog is left alive to pass frantically from one body to the next. Surely there must be some human justice? Bresson delights in confounding our expectations. He excites our sympathy for the woman, but when she is killed denies us catharsis. He shuts the door, and we long—like the anxious dumb dog padding across the floorboards—for some explanation. One can only imagine what passed between Tolstoy and his wife behind the closed door. An accommodation of some sort, for there is, of course, no resolution in life. Behind Bresson's closed door, there is God's unknowable judgment. The Sea of Faith has long since withdrawn, and we have accustomed ourselves to a world which has neither certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain. It is thus addled to Bresson's credit that he should in undiminished old age have created a fully achieved film disturbingly capable of putting the case for the profound irrelevance of mortality, the necessity for the testing paradox of Faith. ■

The truth denied: Yvon returns to the camera shop.



Without hope: Yvon confined alone.



OTHER DANCES:



Breathless,

Valley Girl



and



Baby, It's You

Terrence Rafferty

American films, these days, are all about action, though American life isn't. Onscreen, people are *doing* things—battling the Empire, and so on—while we're pinned to our seats, paralysed by the huge, remote images: images that are perfectly self-sufficient, that couldn't possibly include us. For all the furry adorable creatures and triumphant good guys of *Return of the Jedi*, and all the gleaming bodies and working-class winners of *Flashdance*, these movies are designed to be unapproachable, to remain emotionally and imaginatively opaque. They refuse to reveal themselves fully in the experience of watching them, objects that come to life only when imitated (a dance, a fashion) or bought (a doll, a game). They're hits, not because we recognise ourselves in them, but precisely because their remoteness

stimulates imitation and consumption.

The violent political confrontations of the late 60s have given way to subtler cultural conflicts; and just as the central American films of that period took violence for their subject, the only American movies we can recognise ourselves in today are the ones whose subject is *style*, the patterns of imitation and consumption that now define our cultural identity. And these films—Jim McBride's *Breathless*, Martha Coolidge's *Valley Girl* and John Sayles' *Baby, It's You*—share an oddly retrospective quality: they reflect American Culture in 1983, but they're haunted by the America of the 60s.

McBride's film, of course, is explicitly retrospective, although it makes no attempt to imitate Godard's style or to 'update' the story with specifically contemporary details. It's an evasive, para-

doxical movie: its light, shallow style seems entirely its own, yet the movie has no meaning except in relation to the original—less a remake of *A Bout de Souffle* than a kind of souvenir of it, McBride's *Breathless* is full of significance as a gesture, while remaining self-consciously empty in itself.

McBride and his screenwriter, L. M. Kit Carson, know just what they're doing: they know that the social and aesthetic impact of Godard's film in 1959 can't be reproduced in 1983; they know, too, that their *Breathless* can no more be an authentic 'Godard film' or *nouvelle vague* film than Godard's original could have been a real American gangster movie. And by telling Godard's story in the idiom of the American commercial cinema, they add resonance to their gesture, reminding us both of Godard and,

perhaps even more strongly, of *Bonnie and Clyde*, the first American commercial movie that seemed profoundly influenced by the concerns and techniques of the French New Wave. Their movie reminds us, too, that the American 'New Wave' didn't last very long. In 1967, the year of *Bonnie and Clyde*, McBride and Carson made *David Holzman's Diary*, a lively (and very Godardian) independent film about a young New Yorker, played by Carson, who tries to give meaning to his ordinary, fairly desperate life by filming it in its everyday detail; neither has managed to get much film work in the years since.

What's daring—and unsettling—about McBride's *Breathless* is its relentless self-deprecation, its consciousness of the distance between its models and itself; it uses its own weightlessness as a subject. It runs through its smooth equivalents of sequences from the original film as if they were familiar routines, finally learned by heart and perfected—as if the casual, accidental-looking textures of Godard's images and the abrupt, discontinuous rhythms were, in 1983, so fully assimilated into our sense of life that they've lost their power to shock and to reveal.

Godard's film was, in part, an essay on the social force of the cinematic image: he made Belmondo's signature gesture, rubbing his lips in imitation of Bogart, look like a subversive act. McBride's *Breathless* seems, just as pointedly, a meditation on the loss of that force. His outlaw, Jesse Lujack (Richard Gere), doesn't have models derived from the movies; his heroes are a rock 'n' roller, Jerry Lee Lewis, and a comic-book character, the Silver Surfer, and they don't function in the film the way the Bogart image functioned in *A Bout de Souffle*. Rather than sharpening the outlines of the character, they have the effect of diffusing our image of him. At one point, late in the film, McBride slips in an allusion to the kind of model he might have provided for Jesse, and didn't: Jesse and his girlfriend Monica Poiccard (Valerie Kaprisky), fleeing the police, take refuge behind the screen in a movie theatre, and suddenly they're playing their lovers on the run scene in front of the looming images of John Dall and Peggy Cummins in *Gun Crazy*, Joseph H. Lewis' 1950 version of the *Bonnie and Clyde* story. Jesse and Monica barely glance at the screen, and play out the rest of their scene as if they are unaware of it.

Michel Poiccard's movie-consciousness gives his character a certain—unconventional—stability within the shifting, unpredictable world of *A Bout de Souffle*; the character has no depth, but it has a definite *shape*, a fixed image that stays in the mind. Jesse Lujack, out of rock 'n' roll and comic books, is a blur of undirected energy. When we think of Michel Poiccard, we're likely to picture him at rest—in bed with his hat on, lying on the street with a cigarette in his mouth—but Jesse's never still, always running, tapping his foot or pounding his steering wheel in time to music. And even

when the characters aren't generating their own motion, McBride keeps their physical outlines fluid, shifting. One long sequence is played in a powerful Santa Ana wind: Jesse and Monica talk to each other with the wind whipping their hair and their clothing in all directions, blurring their images at the edges.

While diffusing his characters, McBride sets them against backgrounds that are solidier, sharper-edged than Godard's, as impenetrably artificial as his were natural. Michel Poiccard's drive from Marseilles to Paris, until it's cut short by the murder of the policeman, is shot as a brief, casual essay on the beauties of the French countryside as seen from a speeding car. McBride's sequence of Jesse driving through the desert from Las Vegas to L.A. is accomplished mostly as a process shot, a lurid, posterish desert sunset projected behind Jesse's car: the sequence, shot from outside the car, has a sinister, oppressive feel that undercuts Jesse's delighted, free-flowing monologue on the joys of Monica, L.A., the road, Jerry Lee. So even before Jesse shoots the cop, we're made to feel that his sense of freedom may be illusory. Godard—his camera placed inside the car, recording the journey essentially from Michel's point of view—never suggests that his hero's freedom, before the abrupt turning point of the murder, is anything but real. And the rear-projected sunset in *Breathless* is only the first of a series of large, artificial images that always dominate the characters (like the clip from *Gun Crazy*), and sometimes wholly exclude them (like the blown-up comic book frames that fill the screen when Jesse reads 'The Silver Surfer')—a visual motif that reaches its peak in a long chase through Venice, California, that's all small, darting bodies framed by a delirious succession of wall paintings of 'natural' scenes: bright green landscapes, huge bodies, oceans.

McBride's style is eclectic but graceful: his *Breathless* has narrative flow and visual coherence and, therefore, almost none of the tension of Godard's original. Godard's characters were highly defined, vivid self-creations, cutouts held squarely in the centre of the frame as they look back at us, or rigorously tracked as they circle each other, looking for a position of advantage: every element of the film—Michel, Patricia, the countryside, Paris, the cops—has the same stubborn concreteness, a fundamental equality that makes both the narrative and the visual style volatile, unpredictable. McBride's gliding style gives the Southern California environment a unity, a size that the characters are unequal to. Jesse's got energy, some style, a few smooth moves—but nothing solid enough to keep the culture from blowing him away.

At the end, Jesse is allowed a last dance as the police face him down, and a freeze-frame before he's killed—a brief moment of definition that comes too late, just a magnanimous gesture toward the character from its creator. For that moment, just before the end credits roll, McBride allows us to believe in the potency of the outlaw myth, from *Gun Crazy* through *A Bout de Souffle* to *Bonnie and Clyde*, and to believe in a present that's continuous with the past, the possibility of a style that connects everything—Jerry Lee Lewis, Godard, Penn, comic-book art—in an image of rebellion that can be held at least for an instant before it dies. For that moment, Jesse dominates the image, the way David Holzman, in the act of turning off the camera he has trained on himself, filled the end of all his autobiographical scenes with his own image—as if the highest point of self-consciousness, the peak of identity, were the act of extinguishing yourself. But in 1967 that act was different, an act of self-confrontation, looking into a camera which is the

Breathless: 'artificial images that dominate the characters'.





Valley Girl: Julie (Deborah Foreman) and friends.

extension of your own consciousness, facing an audience that's sharing that consciousness. In 1983, for Jesse Lujack, self-consciousness is the awareness of something behind you—so you whirl, turn your back on the audience whose consciousness is *not* your own, and, remaining in focus, prepare to fire into the overbearing background.

The background of Martha Coolidge's *Valley Girl* is Southern California, too, and her landscape is at least as opaque and forbidding as McBride's—the suburban homes, parched highways and vast, dispiritingly bright indoor shopping malls of the affluent San Fernando Valley—but seen with a documentary neutrality that comes close to humanising it. Her style is unemphatic, exploratory, indiscriminately curious: her sympathetic scrutiny familiarises, without quite celebrating, the most bizarre forms of American culture. The film begins as the satire we expect: the setting is a mall, the dialogue a blast of 'valley girl' talk, banalities heightened to a cheerful frenzy by the constant use of intensifiers like 'totally' and 'to the max'. But it winds up a sweet, rather traditional romantic comedy. The culture Coolidge documents is grotesquely insubstantial, yet it's not threatening because her characters seem to live so unselfconsciously in it—getting what satisfactions they can, enjoying whatever it makes available to them. In its modest way, *Valley Girl* is a genuinely democratic view of cultural confusion, America seen as a shopping mall of possible styles and identities.

Style is the only subject of *Valley Girl*, its narrative devoted entirely to the question of whether valley girl Julie (Deborah Foreman) will stick with her new Hollywood-punk boyfriend Randy (Nicholas Cage), or succumb to the pressure of her friends and dump him. Coolidge treats the story as a pretext for a series of anthropological set-pieces: how valley teenagers dress for a big party; what they

eat when they're there (sushi); what they talk about when they go to the bathroom to check their make-up; what Hollywood's night life looks like from a cruising car; how it feels to work part-time in your parents' health-food restaurant; what the band plays at a valley prom (a song called 'Johnny, Are You Queer?'), and how you'd dance to it. There's less tension in *Valley Girl*'s plot than there is in the tone generated by the profusion of detail, the attitude toward the characters: there are people in this heterogeneous world who take their styles very seriously, who throw themselves into their roles as if they were fighting to uphold a standard, while Coolidge's omnivorous camera levels everything out—it keeps telling us that nothing, really, is at stake.

Coolidge's early documentary films about her younger brother's troubled progress through the 60s (*David: Off and On*, 1972) and about her grandmother (*Old-fashioned Woman*, 1974) have a similar quality, a detached perspective that makes her subjects' absorption in the styles of their times especially touching. It's a kind of family-album effect, an initial astonishment—'They lived this way?'—giving way to an accepting, unitalicised, 'They lived this way.' Both these early films, in fact, tell their stories largely with photos—travel pictures, class photos, studio portraits, snapshots of family groupings. As her subjects narrate and explain, on and off camera, it's clear that the film-maker is after the same sort of information in the present that she has discovered in the photographic record of the past: the way her brother chain-smokes, the way his hard eyes seem to challenge the world; the way her grandmother arranges her hair each day. Coolidge's fascination with styles makes the past and the present seem part of the same reverie, a speeded-up historical pageant in which the characters are changing costumes all the time.

With the fictional material of *Valley Girl*, Coolidge emphasises the thinness of

the story, packs it full of irrelevant bits of business and gets the same effect: the images are crowded with unfamiliar detail, mysterious and insubstantial, like snapshots from earlier eras. A photograph of Julie's parents, now respectably laid-back owners of a health-food restaurant, shows them in their 60s incarnation, all flowing clothes and cascading hair—a style assertive enough to have once seemed evidence of a permanent commitment, but which persists now very faintly in them, reduced to a gentle spirit and a preference for multicoloured shirts. Julie's valley girl style and Randy's punk style have the same fragility and arbitrariness: their personas don't signify anything very important about their characters—Randy isn't very aggressive, Julie isn't especially acquisitive. The real contrast in *Valley Girl* isn't between styles, but between attitudes towards style—between those who wear their styles lightly, just because they're available and attractive, knowing that they'll change, and those who (like Julie's friend Stacy, who's appalled by Randy) have staked their identities on a style, who seem fully prepared to go down with the mall.

Coolidge's lightly objective approach conveys perhaps the most benign attitude possible toward a culture that often looks frighteningly empty to people of the 60s like Julie's parents. Coolidge is able to enjoy the pointless department-store variety of American life, and even to find humour in the discontinuity of our recent history, with a style that's continuous with her own history as a documentarian, and an attitude that's continuous with what her grandmother expresses at the beginning of *Old-fashioned Woman*: 'We didn't worry about who we were, we just lived.' What Coolidge offers is a slightly burnt-out, 60s variation: 'We thought we knew who we were, and then we didn't, and now we, and our children, just live.'

Both *Valley Girl* and *Breathless* have the effect of measuring our distance from the world of the 60s, and they're both movies in disguise—*Breathless* as a chase picture, *Valley Girl* as teen exploitation. Each film seems to cultivate a secret identity beneath a surface that is acceptable to the studio that's backing it and the culture that's receiving it: each, in that way, seems a precise embodiment of the film-makers' generation, a generation of people who are functioning and succeeding in American society without fully accepting that they're a part of it—who separate what they do from what they feel they are, who define what they are by clinging to vestiges of their old values. It's a generation of people who come home from the office each day, toss their briefcases on to the sofa and put on a Hendrix record—who feel, perhaps, that the only way to retain a sense of continuity, of historical identity, is to keep everything living in themselves, to hold each past identity intact until the moment when they'll resolve into a coherent self.

This generation's feelings of marginality and the chameleon quality of its

response are the subjects of John Sayles' films, *Return of the Secaucus 7* (1980) and *Lianna* and *Baby, It's You* (both 1983). They are extremely straightforward works, in a plain, conservative style: like *Valley Girl* and *Breathless*, they're concerned with style in American culture, but, unlike them, their concerns are fully expressed dramatically, in the shape of the narrative and the relation of the characters to each other. Sayles brings a traditional realist aesthetic to bear on the spectacle of American society's multiple identities—to do that, he has to be a bit of a chameleon himself.

Sayles' latest film, *Baby, It's You*, seems a nearly perfect convergence of style and subject: a realistic, mimetic film that's largely about the function of mimesis in the lives of its characters. The protagonists, Jill Rosen (Rosanna Arquette) and Albert 'Sheik' Capadilupo (Vincent Spano), are in their last year of high school in 1967 in Trenton, New Jersey, a north-eastern industrial city in the middle stages of decay: she's from an affluent professional family, and wants to be an actress; he's working class, and wants to be Frank Sinatra. The simple narrative brings them together in an uneasy romance, separates them when Jill enters Sarah Lawrence College and Sheik takes off for Miami, then briefly reunites them at the end; what gives the story depth and unusual emotional complexity is Sayles' concentration on the characters' contrasting modes of self-definition, the ways they try to mirror the world in order to live in it.

Jill, the quieter of the two, is also the more versatile reflector. We see her, at first, predominantly in group shots—at school, or walking and driving in the company of her friends—and nothing in her style tends to distinguish her from the group. When we see her alone, she seems tentative, either waiting for something (a part in a school play, a letter of acceptance from Sarah Lawrence) or trying on a personality, rehearsing herself: after meeting a friend of Sheik's, a working class girl her own age who has dropped out of school, Jill goes home and practises *being* her in her bedroom mirror, imitating her voice and repeating her words—partly in preparation for her role in the school play and partly just to see what it feels like. She's adaptable and she's fairly adventurous about absorbing herself in new identities, unfamiliar experiences—it's this quality that makes her romance with Sheik plausible. But when she gets to Sarah Lawrence, the uncertainty beneath her chameleon ease comes right to the surface. Suddenly she's playing most of her scenes alone in her room or clinging to the phone in the dormitory corridor, and her behaviour in groups is erratic, unsure: on a double date in a bar, she goes totally out of control, blind drunk, laughing hysterically and rattling on and on about Trenton. She's panicked, an actress marooned on stage in a part she hasn't learned.

Sheik has only one role, but it's more specific ('Frank Sinatra'), more flamboyant, more obsessively cultivated—and there's more at stake. He means to stand



Baby, It's You: Jill (Rosanna Arquette) and Sheik (Vincent Spano).

out from his environment, and he does: his sharp suits isolate him in the between-class throng in the corridors; in the cafeteria, he always seems to be standing up when everyone else is sitting down. Unlike Jill's roles, which function as means of assimilation, Sheik's chosen role is a try for transcendence—a solo act which would place him beyond the demands of society, like Sinatra in a separate universe of 'style'. Style, in Sheik's romantic notion, is ineffable and essential, a quality that overwhelms culture—that he hopes will overwhelm Jill, its mirror. When Sheik reaches his crisis point in Miami, it's not because, like Jill, he can't find his proper role. It's because the role he's chosen has been hollowed out, reduced to parody: he makes his living lip-synching jukebox songs by Sinatra (and, worse, Sinatra imitators like Jack Jones), and he lives in a bare-looking room whose only personality comes from the images of his obsessions, Sinatra and Jill, on the walls.

Baby, It's You is structured as an extended single moment of convergence—of two radically different styles, different classes, different sets of expectations about the world. It has the intimacy and closure of a turn on the dance floor with an attractive, unlikely stranger. The film's final image is of Jill and Sheik together at a Sarah Lawrence dance, holding each other—a mismatched couple, he in his slickly tailored suit, she with newly frizzed hair, the vague 'natural' look of the 60s college kid—and moving with the crowd to a rock band's unsteady attempt at 'Strangers in the Night'. This image is, like the freeze-frame at the end of *Breathless*, no more than a held moment, less a resolution than a final gesture before dissolution: we know that the characters' different styles won't resolve themselves into a union. Sheik is disillusioned, emptied out, Jill's trying on a new role and it's not fitting, and they dance again out of affection and loyalty,

not commitment, as if creating a souvenir of their past selves.

The lack of resolution at the end of *Baby, It's You* seems to make this Jill's film, rather than Sheik's, and that's not surprising. Sayles' creative personality—as a novelist, a screenwriter, a director, and occasionally an actor—has a lot in common with Jill's: his realism is a series of wholehearted but temporary acts of identification, of momentary absorption in the styles of America's disparate sub-cultures. (His subjects to date include aging anarchists, interstate truckers, lesbians, coal miners, and a travelling softball team that plays all its games in drag.) But as the camera pulls away from overhead, the rock version of 'Strangers in the Night' begins to fade, until it's drowned out by the voice of Sinatra himself, as if the culture he represents really did transcend the 60s explorations and attempts at cultural fusion—or simply overpowered them.

The different styles of these three films—the self-conscious formalism of *Breathless*, the documentary randomness of *Valley Girl*, the novelistic realism of *Baby, It's You*—are all, equally, gestures played against the giant screen of American culture, by film-makers who have worked, up to now, in its margins. The films share, too, their creators' loyalty to the 60s culture that influenced them and the styles and sensibilities of their own earlier works—a conscious attempt to remain continuous with their own histories, and to oppose that continuity to the self-sufficiency of the present culture. They're disparate gestures of opposition, distinct from each other in both the style and the intensity of their response, that seemed to converge for a moment before they were blown off the screens by *Flashdance* and *Jedi* and *Blue Thunder* and the rest, that became a single image in the mind—of a different kind of battle with the Empire, another dance to the music in the background. ■

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On the Black Isle

Another Time, Another Place/Gavin Millar

Michael Radford has chosen as source for his first feature a novel by Jessie Kesson set during the last months of the Second World War amongst a poor farming community in the inhospitable reaches of the Black Isle in the north-east of Scotland. Italian prisoners-of-war are billeted on the locals. Three in particular are housed in an abandoned hut on the farm of a couple, Dougal and Janie, whose marriage already appears to be under strain. Janie is fifteen years younger than her husband and has little in common with the other farming women. The three Italians set about making their refuge as homely as possible and their relationship with the locals, and especially with Janie, as friendly as possible. Paolo, a young Roman carpenter, is shy and handsome; Umberto, a teacher from Tuscany, is quiet and equable; but it is Luigi, an emotional and talkative Neapolitan fruit vendor, who makes most impact on the reserved but kindly Janie.

The year passes, cementing their friendships, to the disapproval of Dougal and the community. Though attracted to Paolo (whose wife is reported 'missing' in Rome), it is to the engaging Luigi that Janie eventually succumbs, out of a mixture of frustration with her husband's dour unapproachability, and genuine fondness for the madcap extravagance of the foreigner. Riven by guilt, she nevertheless agrees to one final assignation with Luigi following the announcement of the war's ending. During their meeting a village girl is raped, possibly by an Italian prisoner. Jealous locals accuse the temporarily missing Luigi, who faces court-martial. Janie decides to clear him by confessing to their encounter, thus implicating herself. But she is con-

founded by the revelation that Luigi has already incriminated himself disastrously by consorting with her, rape or no rape. She goes to try to make her peace with a woman whose husband has been killed at Monte Cassino, but some apprehension of the unutterable complexities that a mere confession and apology would disguise stops her, weeping but speechless, in the doorway.

The novelettish outlines of the plot belie the deeper layers of observation which make this sure-footed, sober and sensitive film an encouraging sign of Radford's real talent. They are, nevertheless, not entirely by-passed. Though minor curves are thrown pleasantly into the story's predictable advance, such as the affair with the comic Neapolitan rather than the sensual Roman, yet they remain minor, and insufficient to stir us into any new reflections on a subject that has been well pored over. The melodrama after all cannot escape bouncing along on the major springs of opposition: North/South, freedom/imprisonment, love/hate, industriousness/laziness, emotion/reticence; and nothing that the film ultimately shows us expands beyond the predictable ironies that such oppositions usually offer (even if Radford is free of the sententiousness that often accompanies them). The relentless dourness of the inhabitants from Dougal outwards is hard to take: their only relaxations appear to be the annual ceilidh, a granite-like xenophobia and the surreptitious bottle. Speaking as a Scot, though from the sober and cheerful west, I should question the uniform picture of mean-minded cheerless easterners, sunk in their sodden fields, that Kesson and Radford present; especially in such

contrast to the lively Ities, who can scarcely be restrained from a frenzy of wood-sculpting, Marxist studies, partying and home improvements. Such is the Mediterranean life-force.

But this is unfair to the surface delights of the film, which are endearingly well-presented. Radford takes a commendable risk in playing Luigi's early scenes in Italian, leaving Janie, and us, to pick up what we can of his guided tour of the hut and its absent inhabitants. His apologetic thumbnail sketch of the bespectacled Umberto, forever in his texts ('un poco bolshevik, signora'), his admiration for the Madonna carved by the David-like Paolo, his exuberant St Macho's passion for the blessed Alida Valli, whose photograph he cannot believe Janie does not recognise, his pride in Naples, his patriotism, his religiosity, his sentimentality—hard to believe that so much comes over, so engagingly, and so well-judged beside the growing, shy fascination of Janie. A tribute of course to the first-rate performances of Phyllis Logan, who has had much praise, and Giovanni Mauriello, who has had not enough. But the praise belongs equally to Radford. Similarly, Radford is on sure ground with the Italian announcement of the ceasefire. Floods of brown uniforms on bicycles spill down the lanes and overflow into the fields, shouting joyfully, and embracing the captive Scots who stand like stooks of corn, inert and rooted to their earth, as though their disapproval of this display outweighed their pleasure in the cessation of hostilities.

The hostilities, needless to say, continue until the bitter end, more bitter perhaps than it need be, or certainly begging more questions than it answers. But again it may be unfair to expect a first feature to answer any questions at all, other than the confirmation of Radford's gifts. If *Another Time, Another Place* (Cinegate) reminds us of a number of models too eclectically chosen to fit into one film, then they are at least admirable models: too easy and pointless to compute what it is of Bill Douglas or Bill Forsyth Radford doesn't have: the first's tortured poetry, the second's deft idiosyncrasy, and so on. Or that at times we seem to be with Bertolucci in *1900*, at others with the quieter moments of Olmi; then, as the seasons change, to harvesting with Malick and *Days of Heaven*. From time to time Claude Rich's Balloch from *Le Caporal Epinglé* is irresistibly suggested by the modest, owlish bookishness of Gian Luca Favilla's Umberto, as well as that whole film's vision of freedom of spirit. But Renoir too is no bad model, and Radford is not disgraced in their company. The delicacy with which the exasperating discomforts and exhaustions of haymaking shade into the fatiguing triumphs of calving, the same irritating straw now used to clean the blinking, slippery newborn, suggests that he has his own voice too. □

Angel of death

Exposed/Tom Milne

There is a pleasing sense of continuity about the fact that Serge Silberman, who aided and abetted Buñuel through his golden years, should have produced James Toback's third film, *Exposed* (UIP). For if Buñuel sadly is no more, Toback is clearly waiting in the wings to take over the mantle of obsessional explorer of obsessions. Substituting Nastassia Kinski for Harvey Keitel, *Fingers* lives all over again in *Exposed*, with the difference that where Keitel beat his brains out (or rather, drummed his fingers in frenzied tattoo) against a relatively sane world, Kinski seems the one still point in a world gone mad.

This is, in a sense, a film about the illusions that survive the death of illusions. In Paris, as it begins, we watch the methodical execution of a peculiarly callous terrorist outrage: the planting of a bomb in a crowded lunchtime restaurant. In a Wisconsin college, a lecturer (James Toback) harangues his class about the decline of the Western world, urging art and romantic love as the only means of escape. But their set book is *The Sorrows of Werther*, and in discussing the ecstasy of romantic love, he warns of the doom that inevitably follows, quoting Leslie Fiedler's exegesis: "The angel of redemption becomes the angel of death."

The lecturer, clinging to the shreds of a current affair with one of his students, has clearly hit on art as the academic escape route, and to romantic Elizabeth (Nastassia Kinski) this is not good enough. So she walks out on him, college and her dairy farming parents (after a brief agony which echoes the tormented family relationships in *Fingers*), and sets out for New York, city of no illusions in which she is promptly robbed, frustrated in her efforts to find work as a pianist, and reduced to the dread fate prophesied by her father: a job as a waitress. Yet, miracle of miracles, what appears to be a crude pick-up turns out to be a genuine offer from a photographer (Ian McShane), who waves his magic box to transform her into a top cover girl.

The extraordinary thing about these sequences is the way Toback manages to thread a fairytale quality through the *cinéma vérité* bleakness. It is as though an angel hovered over (or in) Elizabeth in her extremity. Discreetly at first, as one mugger, distracting attention after his colleague has gone to work, soothes her, murmurs consolation, sets her on the right road to her hotel, and as the withering desk clerk melts sufficiently to allow her one night's lodging on credit. More overtly as she plays Bach in forlorn audition for a job as background pianist in a restaurant whose manager ("What was the name of that song?") isn't having any: the gesture with which an enchanted waiter offers a single flower makes it the



The cover girl: Elizabeth (Nastassia Kinski).

equivalent of the rose that is a magic lifeline between Cocteau's Beauty and her Beast.

Then, at the launching party for an exhibition of her photographs, Elizabeth is suddenly confronted by a bizarre jack-in-the-box (Rudolf Nureyev), attracted to her as the still centre of a crowd of people clamouring to see and be seen, who equally promptly disappears again. Subsequently popping up all over the place, round corners and behind lift doors, part Mad Hatter and part March Hare as he babbles like a demented clock (in fact quoting William Carlos Williams' poem "The Clock of Time"), he embarks on a weird courtship dance. At first amused and then captivated, Elizabeth is delighted to learn that he is Daniel Jel-line, a concert violinist, alias Josef Tolov. An alias which indeed turns back the clock of time, simultaneously turning fairytale to nightmare, as he lets her leaf through a dossier telling of Tolov's dark history: a father who died in Auschwitz, a childhood spent hiding in terror, a mother now blown to bits in a terrorist outrage in a Paris restaurant.

Romantic ecstasy dictates that she follow when Tolov disappears to Paris, only to realise that he has deliberately lured her there as a decoy: obsessed by the need to end his circle of pain that now centres on the terrorist leader Rivas (Harvey Keitel), Tolov has learned that Rivas' obsession with beautiful women has led to his bewitchment by the face that adorns a thousand magazine covers. Piqued by the betrayal but realising that Tolov has fallen in love with her anyway, Elizabeth obeys a dual romantic impulse—to serve the known, to pursue the unknown—and tracks Rivas down to his hideout. A move in which the angel of redemption becomes the angel of death, and both men die.

Put like this, it may sound both ramshackle and schematic, but Toback builds with a very firm cement mixed out of the photographs of Elizabeth which haunt the film. Ubiquitous on walls, on bookstands, in Rivas' lair, each one differently beautiful and differently enigmatic, they trail like an echo of the photographer's words when the astonished Elizabeth sees for the first time how he has transformed her. "You thought you knew who you were?" he says, describing the way in which people will look and wonder what it is they see. Various characters watch her photo sessions in fascination at various points in the film, irresistibly conjuring the notion of the awed savage wondering whether the soul will be captured by the magic box. What one wonders at the end, as Elizabeth cradles Tolov's body in grief while the corpses of Rivas and two aides sprawl nearby, is whether that soul went into her life or her art.

One may perhaps not succumb entirely to the themes of *Exposed*, which are a greatly revised and improved edition of those in the unhappy *Love and Money*, but it certainly confirms the promise of *Fingers* that Toback is instinct with cinema. He has the early Godard's gift for choosing illuminating locations (the extraordinary vulnerability of the restaurant that is bombed, for instance, or the haunted voids suggested by the mosque and its worshippers, the theatre during rehearsal, the photo session in a vast gallery unfurnished but for serried rows of old master portraits). He has Godard's ability to make each image riveting in its own right in insolent disregard for conventional notions of what constitutes 'going too far'. And he has either coaxed remarkable performances or composed remarkable presences out of Nastassia Kinski and Nureyev. □

Duke Ellington's brother

Zelig/John Pym

Who now remembers Leonard Zelig, the 'Chameleon Man'? He was a figure of the Jazz Age, as mysterious in his own way as Jay Gatsby or the reclusive Kane (and the shadows of both these men are conjured up in Woody Allen's new film). Poor Zelig (Woody Allen in many artful disguises) was a nonentity in the time-honoured mould. To conceal his inadequacy, however, he was endowed with the involuntary ability to change into those with whom he associated: Republicans, Democrats, Negro jazz musicians, Chinese, Hassids. The affliction made him a celebrity.

Zelig (Columbia-EMI-Warner) is a parody; but, like *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, it is never content to sit still. Thus, it is in part a parody of *Reds*: a celebration of a bygone, simpler, cleaner age, offset by the testimony of 'the Witnesses'—in this case, Susan Sontag, Saul Bellow, Irving Howe, Bricktop, Bruno Bettelheim and Professor John Morton Blum, who bob up in colour from time to time, clearly tickled pink to have been invited to appear in a Woody Allen picture, and hold forth in mock solemnity about the meaning of Leonard Zelig. It is also in part a parody of those beloved old quickfire newsreels with their breathlessly assured commentators and their settled view of a world in which America could do no wrong. It is also an extremely accomplished parody of the home movie and the actuality clip: here we have Babe Ruth hefting his bat and there lingering uneasily in the background, just discernible, is the stooped outline of Zelig himself; Tom Mix smiles at the camera, removes his ten-gallon hat and places it on the head of the diffident Zelig.

Woody Allen and his team—photographer Gordon Willis, designer Mel Bourne, editor Susan E. Morse—carry this off with zip, and the kind of exuberance which marked the opening of *Manhattan*. The mixture is very much as before, though as usual it is Woody Allen's new form, primarily, which makes it go down so easily. Our hero is anxious about not having read *Moby-Dick*, or rather is worried that he has lied about having read it. Groups of Hassids are always, for some reason, cause for merriment, and here Allen has them performing an Orthodox version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The picture, as one would expect, is also full of echoes: Dr Eudora Fletcher, Zelig's psychiatrist, is played by Mia Farrow, the Ariel to Allen's inventor in *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*, and has—as far as one can discern through the murk of the simulated old footage—an uncanny resemblance (round spectacles, braided hair coiled over the top) to the stalwart Louise Lasser, Allen's co-star in *Bananas*; the

staccato style and interpolated interviews of *Zelig* remind one of that other early film, *Take the Money and Run*... and so on. For lovers of Woody Allen this is manna.

For some years Woody Allen the comedian has been dogged by the desire to be something other than a comedian; and dogged, too, by tiresome critics who have told him this. He has gone to some lengths to avoid being funny, or at least directly funny. Here Zelig is almost invisible (often literally so): we frequently hear about him, less often glimpse him, and when we do he is invariably skulking in the background. The parody of life in the 20s occasions wonder (how did they do it?), rather than guffaws at the whirl of disguises. Occasionally, however, Allen's natural inclination gets the better of him and he falls into a routine—he mugs for a hidden camera recording this latter-day Elephant Man for science and posterity—which confirms that he has lost none of his old beguiling skill.

Allen is, as we have known for some time, a romantic sentimentalist. His heroes long for that illusive creature, the good, strong, beautiful Woman, to ride in and rescue them from themselves. Diane Keaton was, for all true admirers, the prototype, although she in effect ruled herself out by being almost as scatty as the fictional Allen. The chain-smoking, white-coated Dr Fletcher is more businesslike. She is a psychiatrist but comes from an age when these doctors were healers and intrepid experimenters (in

this imaginary world, at least), rather than witchdoctors who held you in thrall and took away your money. She has a capable sister, Meryl, an aviatrix, played by Stephanie Farrow, Mia's sister. In old age (for she appears as one of the Witnesses), Eudora has the bearing of a handsome, tough New England woman, who knows who she is and whose life has been all of a piece: a true saviour.

The romantic formula has a childish simplicity compared to the elaborate artifice of Zelig's 'world' and the 'investigation' of it. For some time one wonders when Allen is going to get down to the heart of the matter. Eventually, of course, he does. Zelig, a sideshow freak, managed by his monstrous half-sister Ruth and her gangster lover, Martin Geist (they come to a splendidly sticky Warner Bros end), is saved by Eudora. She is engaged to another (it is ever so); but matters work out and she and Zelig are married and live happily ever after. On his deathbed, we learn, Leonard was gearing up, good humouredly, for *Moby-Dick*.

Zelig is full of frantic invention. Towards the end the Little Fellow—and Allen is sufficiently immodest to draw a parallel between himself and Charlie Chaplin (they both fight a paternity suit at the height of their fame)—finds himself in Germany at a Nazi rally: he ruins Hitler's speech by waving in unquenchable joy after spotting Eudora, who has gone to find him, in the audience. But it is the moments of quietness, the understated, in fact barely stated at all moments of romance that really mark the picture with its distinguishing lyrical whimsicality, reveal the signature of its author. □



Zelig's keepers: Geist (Sol Lomita), Ruth (Mary Louise Wilson).

FILM REVIEWS

Blue movie

Danton/Gilbert Adair

The (true) artist advances like the Knight in a game of chess: two steps forward, one to the side. Like the Knight, too, but unlike a more ostensibly mobile figure such as the Queen, he is possessed of the power to leap over occupied squares on the board. And what this implies in practical terms is that, the more pregnant with meaning the original subject matter, the more vital it is for the artist to approach it sideways, by stealth.

In this latter half of the twentieth century, for instance, Auschwitz will have to be added to the Sun and Death, neither of which, said La Rochefoucauld (as quoted in Rossellini's *La Prise de Pouvoir par Louis XIV*), is man able to contemplate directly. In consequence, the most serious cinematic treatments of Nazism have been the most oblique, Lubitsch's farcical *To Be or Not to Be* and Fassbinder's delirious *Mein Camp* extravaganza, *Lili Marleen*. Or take an example from Andrzej Wajda's career, the diptych formed by *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron*. *Marble* was a genuinely dialectical work, oscillating as it did between two sharply delineated periods (the present de-neutralised as a 'period' by contamination with the past), as also between two protagonists who never actually meet, the hapless Stakhanovite labourer, Birkut, and Agnieszka, the pushy, chain-smoking, chain-talking TV journalist rummaging through her country's recent history (and, in Krystyna Janda's performance, one of the most astonishing creations of contemporary cinema). In the sequel, ominously, Agnieszka had given up smoking. Indeed, she and Birkut's son (his father's twin) were apotheosised—statufied, so to speak—as pious, forward-straining heroes out of a tradition that, alas, one can only describe as Stalinist; and the fruit of their hard-working Stakhanovite loins was blessed, in a pathetic little cameo appearance, by none other than Lech Walesa himself. (By contrast, Skolimowski's *Moonlighting* was the *To Be or Not to Be* of Solidarity, and a masterpiece of irony.)

Walesa makes a far more considerable appearance in Wajda's latest film, *Danton* (Artificial Eye). Not, of course, in person. Yet there can be no doubt that, opposite Wojciech Pszoniak's prissy, thin-lipped, vegetarian Robespierre—first prizewinner in a General Jaruzelski lookalike contest, as Woody Allen might say—Gérard Depardieu's sensualist Danton is going to be widely interpreted as a symbolic surrogate for the warm, cuddly Polish dissident. (I intend here no disrespect to Walesa, a man for whose courage I have nothing but admiration. What I am concerned with is his populist public image



Robespierre (Wojciech Pszoniak).

and the on occasion dubious causes it has served in the West.) The problem is that the Terror of circa 1793 simply cannot be equated with the suppression of Solidarity and imposition of martial law in present-day Poland. If the analogy functions at all, it's only at the fuzzily emotive level of 'oppressed peoples' and 'troubled aftermaths'. Danton and Robespierre were revolutionaries both, who differed over the precise course their Revolution ought to pursue; as for Jaruzelski, aside from the fact that he is anything but a fanatic (think, again, of Jeremy Irons in *Moonlighting*), the idea of his being a revolutionary of whatever hue is a bad Polish joke. Thus, the hiatus between what is apparently being signified (for, as is usually the case, Wajda and his scenarist, the inevitable Jean-Claude Carrière, have sought to discourage any such narrow, parochial reading)—the current situation in Poland—and what is doing the signifying—the Reign of Terror—remains unbridgeable. (Honestly, the film would work no better, no worse as an allegory of the recent squabble over the leadership of our own Labour Party—minus the shadow of the guillotine, naturally.)

Since Poland, then, is something of a red herring (except in the hands-across-the-sea manner of a co-production whose every credit has been shared equally between French and Polish technicians), one is obliged to take a long, hard look at the film's foreground. And there, it strikes me, the dearth of invention is total. Almost as though Brecht, Rossellini and Straub never existed, Wajda has gone for a clammy and declamatory rhetoric, one in which there is no 'dialogue', only speeches (the model for Stanislaw Przybyszewska's play would appear to be *Julius Caesar*). And the actors, no doubt thinking of Artaud and Gance, roll their eyeballs and adopt a David-inspired system of gesticulation that one

imagined had been definitively parodied by Rohmer in *Die Marquise von O...*

Even when Wajda has a good idea, he often fatally undermines it. Consider Danton's defence before the Convention, a set-piece filibuster reminiscent of Orson Welles' in *Compulsion* and Spencer Tracy's in *Inherit the Wind*. Long before its conclusion, he has made himself painfully hoarse. Unfortunately, come Robespierre's own turn to take the stand, what do we discover but that he, too, has lost his voice, i.e. he has been (horrendously) dubbed. Since, in this scene, his role is to win over the crowd (which behaves with a comically literal 'fickleness' that reminded me of school-book commentaries on Mark Antony's 'Friends, Romans, countrymen...' oration), the result is catastrophic.

But perhaps I can best express disappointment at what I take to be the film's ingrained academicism by posing—and, forgive the liberty, answering—a pair of hypothetical, possibly trivial, questions. If you were an internationally celebrated director (one deserving of his celebrity) about to embark upon a film set during the French Revolution, what might be your first, off-the-top-of-the-head notions as to (a) the nature of its opening sequence and (b) its overall visual tonality? I'm not sure I can explain why, but I suggest that the answer to (a) is 'a coach entering Paris at nightfall' and (b) a greyish, slaty, sinister blue, of a sort that's particularly effective with rain-swept cobblestones. Having briefly entertained these ideas, however, I hope I would set about racking my brains for something a trifle more personal and less hackneyed. Well, Wajda didn't.

In fairness, I should add that *Danton* is as 'beautifully' made as one would expect; that there are few longueurs in its 2 hrs 16 mins; that the audience I saw it with were engrossed from start to finish; and that I've been wrong before. □



The Prince of Salina (Burt Lancaster) and his family.

Lampedusa revisited

The Leopard/Geoffrey Nowell-Smith

Visconti's *Il gattopardo* was originally shot in Technirama, cut to a length of 206 minutes and printed on Technicolor stock. The sound was the usual Italian concoction. There was a dubbed dialogue track for both Italian and French language versions, in which some of the original actors took part but others, notably Burt Lancaster, were replaced by professional dubbers. The incidental music was recorded in a studio with a full orchestra and in stereo, but the dance music for the ball scene was recorded in mono by a makeshift group of musicians. The ensemble effect when the film was premiered at Cannes in 1963 was stunning. Whatever reservations there might have been about the content, there was near unanimity that aurally and visually the film was a triumph.

Then disaster struck. Twentieth Century-Fox, who had co-financed the film with the Italian company Titanus, decided that it was not worth trying to promote *The Leopard* as a blockbuster on the British and American markets. Length was cut to 161 minutes, release prints were made in CinemaScope and on De Luxe stock, and an English-language soundtrack was prepared without consulting either Visconti or script adviser Archibald Colquhoun (translator of the original novel). In this version Lancaster dubs himself, as does the British actor Leslie French in the minor part of the Piedmontese diplomat Chevalley, but all the other roles were filled by American dubbers. Not only did the Fox version appal Visconti, who threatened legal action ('Leopard man sues Fox,' said the headlines), but it found little favour with audiences. Box-office takings in Britain and the US were less than

sensational. Good, perhaps, for a foreign film; but *The Leopard*, as released, was not a foreign film.

After twenty years of being embargoed for fear of the invidious comparisons that might be made, the Italian language Technicolor version of *The Leopard* has finally been brought to England by Fox and is being distributed by Cinegate. This is not strictly the first time that a reasonably authentic version of the film has been seen here, since one was shown on the BBC, but with English language soundtrack, in 1978—a work of loving restoration which passed largely unappreciated. The BBC version lasted 158 minutes of broadcast time, equivalent to 165 minutes at cinema projection speed, and involved matching a full-length image track to a soundtrack which was both shorter and differently cut. The newly released cinema version lasts 186 minutes, which was the length to which Visconti finally cut it; the print is freshly struck from Technicolor matrices (the director of photography was Giuseppe Rotunno); and it is (rather well) subtitled. What difference does this make?

To start with the colour. Prints of the old release version contrived to be both muddy and garish. The new Technicolor print is very beautiful to look at and seems to reproduce closely (though not absolutely perfectly—the grading is a bit variable) the original intended effect, which is that of a light metaphorically filtered—and probably literally filtered as well—to represent a remembered past. The soundtrack presents a more interesting problem. It is not *a priori* the case that the Italian version must be better. With *Ludwig*, for example, the English version is both technically superior (less

blatantly 'studio') than the Italian version, and also more authentic in that more of the actors are speaking their own lines. But with *The Leopard* the Italian version is—within the terms of a realistic aesthetic—better in all respects.

Not only are the characters of course Italian, but with a largely Italian cast the use of the actors' own language is an obvious advantage. In the release version there is a terrible imbalance between a very imposing self-dubbed Lancaster and a lot of implausible American studio voices attached to the faces of Delon, Cardinale, etc. In the Italian version Lancaster is very well dubbed (probably by the same actor as dubs most of his films) but the dubbing scales down the effect of his performance and makes him less of a dominant, not to say overbearing figure. The dialogues themselves (accurately reproduced in the subtitles) are subtly different and, particularly in the ball sequence, less jarring.

Finally, length. What the old version basically did was cut out the bits where 'nothing happened'. It also, mysteriously, recut some of the scenes at the end in a different order. The cut bits turn out, however, to be important in unsuspected ways. They tend to be scenes of routine activity, or of people relaxing and not doing very much of relevance to the main action—if, that is, one defines the main action as centring on the affairs (personal and political) of the Prince of Salina. The cut scenes all have relevance either to the world at large and the surrounding history or to the world of characters other than the Prince himself. The longer version therefore proves to have a very different balance. There is far less of the individual contrast between the Prince and a unilinear history and far more of a sense of subtle interactions between different individuals (particularly members of the Prince's family) and different historical forces. In this respect the long version is closer to Lampedusa's novel—which is ironic, since it means that it is the changes introduced by Twentieth Century-Fox which have made the film more open to 'Marxist' interpretation and indeed to accusations of being a Marxist tract.

Although less 'Marxist', the long version is not any less Viscontian. What is interesting, to me at least, seeing it for the first time twenty years after it was made, is the extent to which it looks forward to Visconti's later films—far more, I would say, than it looks back to the earlier ones. It really is a modern film. Not only does it look forward to the world of *Ludwig* or even (curiously enough) *The Intruder*; it also seems to be a precursor of much of the modern Hollywood cinema, particularly in its ability to tell a classical narrative without recourse to classical editing, and to work on a spectacular scale without recourse to spectacular mechanics. Neo-realism plus Technicolor, who would have thought it. □



The arena: Keys (Paul Winfield).

Rocking the Ark

White Dog/Richard Combs

Aphorisms: War is Hell said General Sherman, and Walt Whitman claimed to contain multitudes. Both could be said—and should be said in the same breath—about Samuel Fuller and his films, which seem to call forth the bull-headed assertiveness and matter-of-fact contradiction of such prose. And Fuller has been dining out (or making films) for so long on his aphoristic pungency that he might have hit on an especially potent formula for survival here, in that fascination with the crystallising horror of war, the sticking point of battle, combined with a relish for being many things at once, an extraordinary fusing of multitudinous selves. One inherent contradiction of the aphorism which goes straight to the heart of Fuller's cinema is its knack of being both particular and general, viscerally direct and all-embracingly abstract—like a newspaper headline, perhaps, that much-reputed source of his attention-grabbing style. The two-way tendency was most extreme in Fuller's last film, *The Big Red One*, as all-embracing a statement as General Sherman's that has to do with only one GI rifle squad, a succession of skirmishes (hardly even a plot) that is made to add up to a whole world war.

If *The Big Red One* in this respect is about War, *White Dog* (UIP) might be said to be about Hate. Which means that it is based on a notion which again could scarcely serve as the basis of a plot—except in pulp-headline terms. It is only an incident in the Romain Gary book on which the film is based: the author's discovery that the German Shepherd which strays into his Los Angeles home during a freak rainstorm in 1968 has been trained to attack only blacks. His response to this—to have the dog retrained at 'Noah's Ranch', a school for animal actors—is part of his attempt

to deal with everything that seems to be happening around him in that signal year. There is the black power movement, or the endlessly splintering factions of it that also stray into the house through the crusading efforts of his actress wife Jean Seberg; the assassination of Martin Luther King; the student revolution in Paris. The symbolic significance in all this of the white dog, 'Batká', is that he is Gary's means of doing his bit towards changing the world (as opposed to writing about it—a pose of disgust with his role of 'professional beauty' which he frequently strikes). Through the dog, Gary also affirms his faith in the kind of liberalism which shines a light rather than beats out a path, and which was coming in for much militant abuse in '68.

Fuller has taken this chapter of autobiography and turned it into a kind of story. The dog is now picked up, after a highway accident at night, by an aspiring young actress, Julie Sawyer (Kristy McNichol), who finds him useful as a guard dog and an interference in her love life with boyfriend Roland Gray (Jameson Parker), an aspiring young screenwriter, before realising his propensity to turn killer when confronted by anyone black. She turns him over to Hollywood animal trainer Jack Carruthers (Burl Ives), whose office features a dart board made out of R2D2 ('That's the enemy!') and whose boast is that it was his hand which, taking on a nest of rattlesnakes in John Wayne's stead in *True Grit*, helped to win Duke the Oscar. But the injection of a young couple into the story is a strangely transparent device—something which veteran Hollywood directors seem inclined to do to prove their market-worthiness without really knowing how to incorporate these characters as young people. It is not this scaffolding which lends the film its charge, however, but

the point where the personal, symbolic significance of Gary's encounter with the white dog is transmuted into Fuller's own kind of abstraction, something yellow-journalistic in approach, cut with imagery which tends to the surrealist: an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with hate.

At Carruthers' 'Noah's Ark', the dog is turned over for deprogramming to a black trainer, Keys (Paul Winfield), who becomes obsessed with discharging the racial hatred that has been invested in the animal. In one respect, this is visualised predictably enough as a gladiatorial contest—predictable except in the way it is visualised, with the camera playing over the architecture of the cages as if the arena itself contained some truth about the meeting of man and beast. But more important is a literal 'visualising' of violence—the impinging of images of violence (large close-ups of the dog blinking in front of a noisy war film on TV, unaware that his mistress is being raped in the next room), and the release of violence at the moment of eye contact (most elaborately, during a film-within-the-film sequence, when slow motion and a flickering back projection accentuate the sense of optical delusion, of the dog's responses keyed to an emotion that is not his own). The film-making milieu thus ceases to be merely a factor of Jean Seberg's career, and becomes crucial to the way Fuller has dealt with the symbolism of Gary's dog—compressing and reordering it into one direct metaphor. Without Hollywood as a setting, he might have followed Hitchcock and employed a black colour wash to represent what was happening to the animal.

Completely compressed, in fact, are all the sociological ramifications which are more the subject of Gary's book than the dog. There is nothing here of black power, of the author's fears and hopes of the convulsions of black militancy that are overtaking America, of his own jet-setting efforts either to escape those convulsions or (in Paris) to protest in the name of his outraged humanism. There is, actually, more explanation in the film of how a white dog is created (a poor black is hired to mistreat the animal systematically from an early age), and Fuller includes Gary's confrontation with the acceptable face of racism when the real owner of the dog one day turns up to collect him. To Gary, 'the most heart-breaking thing is that this man is *not* a son-of-a-bitch. He is as nice as God can make them.' Fuller casts him as a jocular grandfather figure, physically much like Burl Ives (or akin to the director's own grandfatherly presence in the film—the world is divided into the unfathomably young and the treacherously old).

But otherwise the headline-writer in Fuller has bypassed the journalism in Gary's book to come up with his own final image of racial hatred unleashed as a kind of randomly swivelling revolver. In Gary's account, it is the final proof of an insane polarisation of society when he

learns that Keys' retraining has been designed to turn the animal into a 'black' dog. Here the experiment is also a failure, not because of the trainer's Black Muslim loyalties, but because the hatred inculcated in the dog is a force that must have an out—or an image of violence that must have its day. A final *corrida* at Noah's Ark turns on an exchange of looks between Keys, Carruthers, Julie and the dog, in which it seems to remain arbitrary whose gaze will be locked with the dog's in a final, fateful triggering of his psychosis. For the moment, we are again looking down that gun barrel, turning in search of a target in *Forty Guns*. Elsewhere, images of violence are as extreme as anything in *The Big Red One*. The crazed horse that charged out of battle at the beginning of that film is duplicated here in the brief, dream-like scene of Carruthers' menagerie coming to life at night as the white dog escapes from his

cage and clears an electric fence.

Fuller's own eschatology of violence aside, the horse in *The Big Red One* might put one in mind of *Thomas l'Imposteur*, and the animal scenes here of *Les Yeux sans Visage*. It takes us back, perhaps, to one of the basic contradictions about Fuller that his pulp-journalist energies, the aphoristic bluntness of his themes, also unite with (or escalate into) a different kind of poetry. It is another contradiction—an essential ingredient, perhaps, in that formula for survival, at least in critical terms—that so quintessentially American a director should be reborn with virtually every new wave in Europe (from Godard to Wenders). There are ample reminders of this in *White Dog*, which throws up a variety of transatlantic resemblances. Fortunately, through Gary and Jean Seberg, there is reference back to Godard—the film is also a reappropriation of that gun

barrel image which Godard appropriated for *Breathless*. In his unexaggerated but crisply selective treatment of décor and colour, Fuller is not unlike the pop portraitist in early Godard, and he manages to top *Pierrot le Fou* by guest-starring himself twice here: once as an agent, snarling 'terrible news' down the phone to his star, and once, in the surrogate guise of Marshall Thompson, as the disinterested director of the film-within-the-film. The most uncanny family resemblance, however, is back through the book to Romain Gary himself, who for all his airs and graces as the world-weary aesthete only looking for a little restful alienation, is also given to referring to himself as a man who must keep his own violence on a tight leash (and who has a very Fullerian addiction to cigars). If this European in America didn't exist, one feels, Fuller might have invented him—or vice versa. □

The incisive fossa

The Outsiders/Gilbert Adair

Writing about *Tootsie* in the Summer 1983 issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Nick Roddick confessed to being a trifle envious of those of his colleagues of whom nothing more was expected, in a review of the film, than 'I laughed and laughed'. Francis Coppola's *The Outsiders* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) is not a comedy, anything but. In fact, it's a melodrama, a melodrama made specifically for the attention of teenagers, a real two-handkerchief (or maybe two-sleeve) weepie. But though of unquestionable interest to all those who have followed the director's career with sympathy—especially when coupled, as it will be, with its forthcoming sequel, the black and white, reportedly Camus-inspired (!) *Rumblefish*—it's doubtful whether anyone not actually moved to tears by the predicament of its youthful principals will profit in the least from a critic's attempts at illumination.

The film is dedicated to the librarian and students of the Lone Star Junior High School in Fresno, California, who petitioned Coppola to adapt their very favourite book (by S. E. Hinton, whose novels are apparently required reading for schoolchildren in both the United States and this country). 'I wanted to make a movie about youth, and about belonging,' Coppola has said, 'belonging to a group of people with whom you made identification, and where you felt real love. Even though those boys were poor and, in a way, insignificant, the story gives them a kind of beauty and nobility.' In the event, his *mise en scène* not only lends Hinton's crazy, mixed-up kids (the dated jargon is perfectly appropriate here) 'beauty and nobility', it transforms them into angels. *The Out-*



The fossa: Ponyboy (C. Thomas Howell).

siders is a CinemaScope stained-glass window (Panavision, to be precise, but Coppola has clearly been influenced by the dynamic, mannerist CinemaScope framing of Nicholas Ray, whose *Rebel Without a Cause* is this film's obvious model).

The promotion of Johnny, Dallas, Ponyboy and Sodapop to the plane of angelism has been effected—aside from the casting of the various young actors, all of whom have strikingly noble and beautiful features—by the application of two recurring motifs, one of almost textbook artfulness, the other more latent and therefore more insidious. The first, as every schoolkid seeing the film will realise, is that of 'gold'—gold, however not as a symbol of valiative immutability but as the ultimate, nostalgic trace of evanescence, be it the evanescence of an afternoon in late summer or of youth itself. The theme is picked out in the

Stevie Wonder ballad 'Stay Gold', orchestrated in Frost's poem 'Nothing Gold Can Stay' and finds its most poignant expression in the injunction of the dying Johnny to Ponyboy, the latter's hair now dyed blond for the purposes of disguise: 'Stay gold!' As visual correlates, there are the gorgeous Oklahoma sunsets that punctuate the narrative and the warm flesh tints of all involved. *Toutes proportions gardées*, none of this is very different from the gold of a Fra Angelico altarpiece.

Of the other motif, I propose only its synecdocheal (and no doubt whimsical) emblem. Coppola's film is a homage (unwitting or witting, it's hard to say) to one of the most charming if unsung glories of the human face, the narrow, moist little furrow which separates the nose from the flowing, monogrammed M of the upper lip, and which, I believe, is called the *incisive fossa*. The great period of the incisive fossa was, of course, the 50s and 60s, what with Sal Mineo in *Rebel Without a Cause* and, in *West Side Story*, Richard Beymer (along whose 70mm fossa one felt like running barefoot). Seldom since that period has a film camera lingered so amorously on it, on flaring nostrils, on the tiny highlight of a satiny lower lip and the soft liquidity of an adolescent's eyes. *The Outsiders*, indeed, verges on the homo-erotic (toppling over once and for all with the image of Ponyboy's clumsily but glamorously peroxided curls); and its commercial success in the United States ought to give rise to some reflection. For though, by Coppola's own account, *Rumblefish* was intended as the 'art movie' of the pair, what we have here is one of the most overtly aesthetic, art-for-art's-sake films in Hollywood's history, a *faux-naïf* Pre-Raphaelite mural in which angels with dirty faces but immaculately pure hearts burn with a hard, gemlike flame before being snuffed out in their prime. Reader, I cried. □

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BOOK REVIEWS

Thought Control

FILM AND RADIO PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II

edited by K. R. M. Short
Croom Helm/£15.95

The cover of this book—a symposium of talks first given at a conference sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1982—depicts Charlie Chaplin as Adenoid Hynkel, resplendent in a uniform decorated with the sign of the Double Cross, lifting his hand in an all too familiar gesture of salute. But if this raises hopes that at long last we are to be given some account of the part *humour* played in the battle for hearts and minds waged by film-makers in the Second World War, we are in for a disappointment.

The plot of *The Great Dictator* is summarised, but comment on it turns out to be as trite as it is brief; and the only thing we hear about Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* is that the contributor who has undertaken to discuss the fight against anti-Semitism in the Hollywood movies of 1940-45 has not managed to see it. Yet as we all know, British films that set out to fortify belief in the British way of life in its struggle against a Germany whose intellectual as well as political life was dominated by the Nazis were apt to raise humour to a programmatically important position: one has only to recall the discussions Leslie Howard's professor held with the Goering-like figure projected by Francis L. Sullivan in *Pimpernel Smith*—discussions that centred on the Nazi's failure to appreciate the art of Lewis Carroll.

From the wartime George Formby films (in one of which he fought an epic dream-battle with Hitler) and the Crazy Gang's immortal *Gasbags* to the shorts commissioned by the Ministries of Information and Food, humour was seen to be one of this country's strongest weapons. Though it did not loom as large, proportionately, in the American cinema, it did help to mould public attitudes in a whole series of films that ranged from crude but memorable shorts like *The Devil with Hitler* to *The Great Dictator*. Eric Barnouw, in a characteristically terse and telling contribution dealing with Radio Luxembourg, pays due attention to comedy programmes that made important propaganda points. If there is a monograph about the BBC's use of comedy for similar purposes, the bibliographies supplied by the

contributors to this symposium give us no inkling of it; and if there isn't, there should be.

The wartime Leslie Howard movies are as conspicuous by their absence from the discussions gathered in this book as *Mrs Miniver*, whose propaganda value Winston Churchill is known to have valued so highly; but such omissions are inevitable in a collection of papers by several hands. What seems much more regrettable is the failure of every one of these contributors to integrate thematic with formal analysis. We hear a great deal of the different ways in which film-makers introduced propaganda elements into their work, but almost nothing of the way in which camera movement and cutting are enlisted in the service of an open or concealed message. This may be a reaction against recent structuralist excesses—but if it is, the reaction has surely gone too far.

If one accepts the limitations I have indicated, one is left with a collection of papers that is well planned and full of interest. Philip M. Taylor supplies an Introduction that sets different types of hardcore and softcore propaganda used in the Second World War against a historical background which includes the years 1919-1939. This is followed by seven papers dealing with varying aspects of propaganda and slanted information disseminated on the Allied side. Nicholas Pronay analyses the way British film-makers projected their peace aims and prepared the way for the Socialist landslide of 1945; Thomas Cripps writes on racial ambiguities in American wartime movies; K.R.M. Short documents aspects of Hollywood's fight against anti-Semitism; and there are pieces on French film propaganda before the fall of France in 1940, on film propaganda in wartime Russia, on propaganda put out by Radio Luxembourg (with a welcome excursus on the kind of 'black propaganda' David Hare has recently depicted in *Licking Hitler*), and an account of the experiment in 'social engineering' undertaken in the *Why We Fight* series.

Five contributors discuss the control of information, and dissemination of misinformation, in Fascist Europe. Pierre Sorlin and Elizabeth Strelbel, in two papers of unusual interest, deal with differences and similarities of film propaganda in occupied and 'unoccupied' France; David Ellwood and Gianni Rondolini discuss the films characteristic of Mussolini's Italy (and throw some interesting light on the early films of Roberto Rossellini); and David Welch deflects attention from those Nazi features and documentaries which have attracted so much attention of late to concentrate on the way the ministry

headed by Goebbels, and its subordinate organisations, controlled and shaped newsreels for home and foreign consumption. A brief final section adds two views of wartime propaganda in Japan: a scholarly overview by Gordon Daniels is followed by an account of personal involvement by Nami-kawa Ryō, who worked for a Japanese overseas broadcasting service during most of the war.

Some errors have, inevitably, crept in—as when the editor, in his own contribution, calls Württemberg a ‘city’, Germanises Isidore Ostrer to ‘Isidor Osterer’, speaks of ‘Berthold’ Brecht and Field Marshal ‘Hindenberg’, or tells us that *Professor Mamlock* was banned in Britain without mentioning that it was in fact shown in many provincial cities during World War II. I myself remember seeing it, in Russian with English subtitles, in the packed Scala cinema in Coventry soon after war had broken out. The usual garbling of titles in foreign languages (*Der Melitarbefehlshaber in Frankreich*) is compounded by absurdities produced by double translation. When Elizabeth Strel, in her otherwise admirable essay on the Vichy cinema, tells us of a film called *The Young Hitlerien*, we must mentally translate this back into French (*Le Jeune Hitlerien*) and search our memories to recall that this was one of the titles under which *Hitlerjunge Quex* was released to French cinemas.

It would be wrong, however, to end on a carping note. *Film and Radio Propaganda in World War II* offers a notable series of studies of propaganda or information control, which it shows in all its forms: bullying and overt, or secretly persuasive and insinuating; reinforcing solidarity, or instilling fear; manipulating documentary material, or slanting fiction; projecting present concerns back into history, or keeping to the time in which the propagandist and his potential audience live; agitating, or calming.

The contributors flesh out, in their different ways, Jacques Ellul's distinctions between political and sociological propaganda, agitation and integration, vertical and horizontal propaganda and rational and irrational propaganda, and in the process they exemplify the categories first set out in Michael Balfour's *Propaganda in War 1939–1945*: (1) false statements made in the genuine belief that they are true; (2) deliberate lies; (3) *suggestio falsi*; (4) *suppressio veri*; and (5) the slanting of news. They thus supplement in important ways such recent publications as Richard Taylor's *Film Propaganda in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* and A. P. Foulkes' *Literature and Propaganda*.

The conference at which these

papers were read and discussed must have been an unusually stimulating one; and in our gratitude at being allowed to share the pleasure and instruction that conference afforded its participants we shall not find it difficult to forgive the editor some clumsy formulations which mar his Preface to this useful volume.

S. S. PRAYER

Clove Hitch

THE LIFE OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK

by Donald Spoto

Collins/£12.95

Donald Spoto's subtitle, ‘The Dark Side of Genius’, is on the catchpenny side, and while his book was under way the notion certainly got around that Hitchcock's reputation was in for a sorry slamming. Serialisation in the *Daily Mail*, in the slot where all has been unfilially revealed about Joan Crawford, Peter Sellers, Bing Crosby, etc, hardly helped the book's reputation, whatever it may have done for its sales. But this biography is much better than the advance build-up. It takes stamina and industry to construct 500-plus pages of text about the life (not, critically, the work, which Mr Spoto has treated elsewhere) of a man who by all accounts, including his own, did very little except work. The book is serious, even solemn, and sometimes clumsy; it is never dull.

Mr Spoto has talked to a man who was at school with Hitchcock, an early victim of bully-boy tactics later to be refined into the rather frightful Hitchcock brand of practical joke. At the other end of the long life, he has talked to David Freeman, the writer who tried to make sense of the George Blake escape story, the film Hitchcock never made and by that time could not have made, after Ernest Lehman had backed away from the septuagenarian director's ‘obsession’ with a rape and murder sequence. The dark side was there all right, and there is a parade of witnesses to testify to it.

‘A man of exaggeratedly delicate sensibilities,’ wrote John Houseman of Hitchcock in the 1940s, ‘marked by ... the scars from a social system against which he was in perpetual revolt and which had left him suspicious and vulnerable, alternately docile and defiant.’ The fat, solitary boy, who was required to report his day's doings every night to his mother, had by then become the grossly fat (at that time twenty-six stone) man, who protected himself against hazard and hostile

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BOOK REVIEWS

surroundings by massively deep defences, which included the joker's tricks, the trickster's jokes, the extreme order and discipline of his film-making methods and the bowler-hatted rectitude of his private life. 'Not a man to go camping with,' said David Selznick, also of Hitchcock in the 1940s.

Until he gets Hitchcock safely established in America, being instructed by Selznick that 'We bought *Rebecca* and we intend to make *Rebecca*,' and that a vulgar scene of seasickness which the director planned would not be tolerated, Mr Spoto seems not entirely sure of his ground. He's less than confident about the British social scene, Edwardian London (it will surprise many that Cockneys 'rigorously avoided the articulation of feeling') and even the difference between a greengrocer and a grocer. But, with beaverish thoroughness, he has tracked down the school set-books (which included *Bleak House*) and the plays Hitchcock saw as a young theatregoer.

Mr Spoto's thesis, however, belongs essentially to the American years: that, from about the time of *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock's work 'became a more acute spiritual autobiography with each film—an autobiography

based on outer experiences that transmuted themselves into tortured, guilt-ridden fantasies.' A bit much? No doubt, but it is the ever fascinating links between this complex man and his creations which justify raking over the ashes of the private life, and no one would ever have thought the work sprang from a sunny and simple nature. *Vertigo* and *Marnie* of course remain key texts, worked for all they have to offer. (Mr Spoto, incidentally, makes a handsome volte face: those of us who derided the technical sloppiness of *Marnie* apparently had right on our side. Hitchcock was not trying for Expressionism; he simply lost heart and interest after he felt let down by Tippi Hedren.)

John Russell Taylor's *Hitch*, the 'authorised biography' written in Hitchcock's lifetime, does not, naturally enough, include the drinking, tensions at home, increasingly painful and embarrassing infatuations with a succession of leading ladies. On the lighter side of the darker side, poor Hitchcock is even revealed by Spoto as a secret ice-cream eater. But Russell Taylor's book, much more cheerful and perhaps fundamentally not less 'true', also allowed for periods of great depression and unease, and those

irrational fears of authority and apprehensions of calamity which seem to have haunted Hitchcock's life and informed the work. Often, the difference between the two books is more one of tone and shading than of factual substance. Russell Taylor, for instance, gives only a few lines to Tippi Hedren's ordeal when they flung birds at her for a week during the shooting of *The Birds* (she 'only became hysterical when a bird nearly clawed out an eye'); Spoto devotes to it two pages of distressed, detailed description. One point on which the two books disagree is, however, very plainly factual. Was Hitchcock a boarder at school (Taylor) or a day boy (Spoto)?

In his later years, with the failures of *Topaz* and *Torn Curtain*, ill health, perhaps a loss of control over his own fantasies, Hitchcock was not a very happy man. Mr Spoto quotes an impressive gathering of scriptwriters—Brian Moore, Samuel Taylor, Anthony Shaffer and Ernest Lehman—and the picture they paint is always absorbing and often sombre. But there also survived, one would have thought, that built-in English sense of saving irony. A tiny example, not directly concerned with Hitchcock himself, comes towards the end, when Hitchcock rather uncharacteristically was preparing tea trays for the frail Alma. 'If the worst happens,' she said, 'he can always be my maid.' An elderly London lady, one might think, revealing that she had not lost her sense of comic incongruity. (Although Alma, always possibly more adventurous in private life than her husband, had become an American citizen years before Hitchcock himself took that plunge.) Mr Spoto adds an unnecessary, worried gloss: 'she was most likely referring to the unimaginable: the elected or enforced end of his film career.'

In any event, this is a book of continually lively and rewarding detail, from the list of twenty or so titles that David Selznick worried over before settling on *The Paradine Case* (for the connoisseur, they included *Guilty!* and *Guilty?*) to the fact that the unit on *The Trouble with Harry*, dogged by bad weather on those seemingly splendid locations, were reduced to gathering fallen leaves which would later be attached, one by one, to Paramount's plaster trees. It is a pity, however, that publishers' editors on both sides of the Atlantic did not point out to Mr Spoto that 'move' is a shorter and happier word than his repeated 'relocate', that disinterested is not synonymous with uninterested or disarticulate with inarticulate and that whatever weapons were employed during the Sidney Street Siege, they are unlikely to have included artillery.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Kubrick gap

KUBRICK

by Michel Ciment,
translated by Gilbert Adair
Collins/£8.95

Michel Ciment's study—an unusual combination of lavishly illustrated coffee-table tome and in-depth exegesis—in effect does a similarly schizoid service to its subject. Tactically, the richness and variety of the stills and the organisation of the argument (a breakdown into numbered subject-sections rather than a film-by-film career) constitutes a shrewd attempt to avoid the monolith that Kubrick has made of that career, to rearrange its blandly unified pattern in a kind of analytical montage, and to bridge those baffling distances that seem increasingly to separate the artist from his work, his interpreters and his audience. Strategically, however, Ciment's piecemeal approach leaves no room for synthesis, no way of turning these enumerated delvings into a reading that doesn't lead straight back to the films' inscrutable surface, and to those conventional endorsements which it seems to invite ('one of the most demanding, most original and most visionary film-makers of our time').

There is about the book something of the peculiar effect of *Vertigo*'s famous tracking-out-while-zooming-in shot: elements of the film-maker and his work are brought closer than ever before, while the distance between them is made to seem even greater. The stills include a whole gallery of director-at-work portraits, from his first film, *Fear and Desire* (1953), to *The Shining*, itself a fascinating chronicle given the seclusion and inaccessibility that has become part of the Kubrick ethos (and of the Great Artist brand image). *Fear and Desire*, incidentally, the one truly inaccessible Kubrick film, receives scant mention in the text, leaving it unclear whether the author has actually seen it. Otherwise, the tying of stills (including some frame enlargements, in unusually sumptuous reproduction) to the text is not so much visual analysis as visual corroboration. It is useful mainly for the one-off, unexpected juxtaposition (the physical resemblance between Malcolm McDowell in the drugstore of *A Clockwork Orange* and Leon Vitali invading his stepfather's club in *Barry Lyndon*), rather than the predictable illustrations of war and violence ('Kubrick's world is forever on the brink of collapse') or the fascination with technology.



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BOOK REVIEWS

The most interesting picture comparisons, in fact, are the ones that can't be too easily developed in the text. A group of shots including Keir Dullea and Jack Nicholson advancing bug-eyed out of the dark in *2001* and *The Shining* respectively, and labelled 'return of the repressed', is more suggestive than the attempt actually to apply a Freudian analysis to *The Shining* ('might not the gift of second sight... be another instance of the substitutive relation common to dreams, fantasies and myths, between the eyes and the penis?'). On the other hand, Ciment's valuable analysis of the dramatic pattern of family—and particularly father-son—relationships in Kubrick (only three dates, he claims, are explicitly given in the films: 1776 in *Lolita*, 1789 in *Barry Lyndon*, and July 4th in *The Shining*, 'Oedipal juncture(s) in history') is not really susceptible to illustration. Though here again, a group of shots of wheel-chair-bound authority figures in *Dr Strangelove*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Barry Lyndon* doesn't really find a place in the argument.

In other instances, the fact that certain subjects can be so easily illustrated lends the discussion itself a rather 'decorative' quality. Images of the court-martial château in *Paths of Glory*, the Louis XVI décor of the space-man's nirvana in *2001*, and the historical setting of *Barry Lyndon* key some fascinating remarks on Kubrick's interest in the eighteenth century, on the conjunction of reason and passion, order and chaos, machine-tooled plots and human breakdown in his films. But the historical detail Ciment draws on here ('Laclos, a ballistics expert and inventor of the shell, and Beaumarchais, a clockmaker and inventor of the lever watch, were no less skilled in the depiction of feelings') is left high and dry by the rather crude case that is put for the importance of Kubrick's treatment of history: 'the eighteenth century is rotten to the core, an age awaiting its impending destruction...'

The attitudes working within Kubrick's films—the meshing, the interdependence, of a historical pessimism with deterministic plot structures—is elided by the kind of hyperbole which suggests that the *auteur* really is plugged into doomsday, that he has something of overriding political importance to impart. And this leads unerringly to those generalities and banalities of film criticism trying to ordain its subjects as visionaries: 'Kubrick's vision of history is a nightmare, illustrated by ordinary, everyday terror, executions *pour encourager les autres*, the atomic holocaust, the savagery of the Roman legions, and the corruption and brutality of

American society.' Similarly, discussion of Kubrick's style briefly suggests that he has embraced both 'meticulous realism and wilfully flamboyant expressionism' (with many stills tendentiously adducing 'the film noir influence'). Such a glib visual reading is fortunately outweighed by a section attempting to define the relation between realism, naturalism, Kubrick's passion for research and his reputation as an obsessive super-technician.

Given the structure of the book, it is rather hard (which also does it less than justice) for it to be more than the sum of its parts. The problem is aggravated by the three interviews with Kubrick (on *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon* and *The Shining*) which follow the critical chapters, and which again were presumably intended to bring a more complete Kubrick into focus. But as an interview subject, the director remains as blank as, from many points of view, do his films. His comment, in connection with the play on telepathy and telephones in *The Shining*, that 'failure of communication is a theme which runs through a number of my films' is just about his sole self-interpretative sally. Otherwise, the two most insistent themes of his answers, the problem of time (how to reduce novels to two hours on the screen) and of order (how to plan a film while leaving room for the creative accident or improvisation), set the themes of his films in a pragmatic, rather ironically diminished perspective. This arrangement tends to leave the impression that the apocalyptic artist of Ciment's interpretation and the patient assembler of the best materials available (classical music, etc) who emerges from the interviews are integrally the same. Which then raises a large problem of intentionality and interpretation, throwing us back into what, to adapt a phrase from *Dr Strangelove*, might be called the Kubrick gap.

RICHARD COMBS

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN BAYLY was an independent producer for ten years; he directed the 5-part drama series *Joni Jones* for S4C... STEPHEN BOTTOMORE is a freelance film editor and television producer currently working on a history of the early years of the cinema. ROBERT BROWN is a film editor at the BBC... JOHN HOWKINS edits *InterMedia* for the International Institute of Communications... PAUL MAYERSBERG's most recent script was Nicolas Roeg's *Eureka*... S. S. PRAYER is Taylor Professor of the German Language and Literature, University of Oxford. His most recent publication is *Heine's Jewish Comedy*.

LETTERS

MIFFed

DEAR MISS HOUSTON—Most magazines would have let my rebuttal of Almereida's erroneous conjectures on the Manila International Film Festival be the end of the correspondence; and most readers, I think, would have been grateful. Instead, you try the patience of the latter, and show your partisanship for the former, by allowing Almereida, who shelters in his own pseudonymity while attacking other people by name and their integrity by innuendo, simply to repeat what he had imagined to be so in the first place. I hope my answer indicated wherever possible how much of what you printed is factually and demonstrably untrue.

I am quite willing to stand in the company of those who support Manila—they include the BFI's own chairman—without fearing that my high liberal principles will suffer for it. Those of us who travel abroad—unlike Almereida who sits at home and makes up his stories—cannot afford to be virgins. Some however do a good job of seeing no evil—and certainly incurring none—when they do go to countries where 'political repression' of the kind that so exercises Almereida should be 'of concern to critics'. How inconsistent of you to indulge this view in Almereida's column, but apparently not encourage the BFI's Ian Christie to note any evidence of 'repression' in his lengthy travels through the Soviet Union, on which he reports in your summer issue. I'm sure that critics will be 'concerned' to hear of how his chummy conversation with his Soviet hosts 'faltered' when he enquired, audaciously, if there were any women film-makers in Armenia—there are, incidentally, in the Philippines: and very good ones, too. And that euphemism he used, 'arrested', doesn't really do justice to what happens to non-conformist films in the Soviet Union, and still less to non-conformist film-makers—now does it?

I don't know how much this assisted trip cost the Soviet Union: they are not much given to quoting figures in that country, be they for foreign tourists or even for victims of domestic accidents to their own workforce. But I am quite sure SIGHT AND SOUND readers will be interested to hear that the Soviet authorities' failure to live up to their commitments under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Helsinki Final Act played its part in persuading our Foreign and Commonwealth Office to turn down flat the British Film Institute's request to help pick up the bill for a Soviet film delegation invited to London by their friends at 127 Charing Cross Road. If Almereida wishes, and you

concur, I can produce many similar examples of how the organisation which publishes your periodical selects its political bedfellows. They would certainly enliven your drably edited pages.

Yours sincerely,
ALEXANDER WALKER
Maida Vale W9

Mr Walker has asked us to make it clear that Almereida has not been willing to identify himself. Mr Walker has criticised the BFI on occasions in the past, and will no doubt do so again. We hope, however, that as far as Manila is concerned this correspondence may be regarded as closed.—

EDITOR

Ernst Jünger

SIR,—I enjoyed Tom Milne's balanced and perceptive review of *One Man's War* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1983), but noticed that it perpetuates some common misconceptions about the German writer Ernst Jünger.

In the first place, Jünger was not an aristocrat (nor a Prussian), but the son of a small-town pharmacist from Lower Saxony. Secondly, Jünger never was military commandant of the German occupation army in Paris, or anything like it. He began and ended the Second World War with the rank of captain. As to Jünger's attitude towards the Nazis, which Tom Milne seems to regard as somewhat ambiguous, perhaps the following will help to put the record straight. As a famous author and (World War One) war hero, who had never been a socialist, liberal, or even democrat, Jünger was one of the very few authors whom Hitler and Goebbels desperately wanted to attract to their side. Jünger's response was quite unambiguous. He turned down both a Nazi parliamentary seat and election to the nazified Writers' Academy, and forbade the official Nazi daily, the *Völkische Beobachter*, to reprint any of his writings, on the grounds that 'this might give the impression that I am one of your contributors.'

The publication of Jünger's thinly disguised anti-Nazi novel, *On the Marble Cliffs*, in 1939 caused a tremendous literary sensation in Germany, followed by an immediate ban. Also banned was Jünger's next book, *Gardens and Streets*, which contained his diary of the 1940 campaign in France. By this time, Jünger was in such danger that high-ranking friends and admirers in the German army arranged for his transfer to Paris, where he was placed under the protection of General Speidel, and later General von Stülpnagel. His duties were to 'provide historical records of certain events, in accordance with special orders.' In fact, this meant that Jünger

was in charge of the secret documents recording the relations between the Nazi authorities and the German army—a highly dangerous subject, if the Gestapo had ever obtained the keys to the armoured safe in which these papers were kept.

Jünger took no direct part in the coup attempt of July 1944 (which succeeded better in Paris than anywhere else), though many of the conspirators were his friends. For one thing, his rank was too low to make him an effective participant, but also his higher-ranking friends did not want further to endanger his life. He did, however, write for them the pamphlet 'The Peace', which they regarded as one of their manifestos, should the coup succeed. After the failure of the coup, followed by the execution of his protector, von Stülpnagel, Jünger was dismissed from the army on the grounds of 'unworthiness to serve'. It seems that there was a Gestapo warrant out for his arrest, and he was saved only by the disintegration of the German police apparatus towards the end of the war.

Returning to the diaries on which the film is based, I think it is clear that the aesthetic, ivory-tower observer attitude which Jünger assumes there is some-

thing of a literary pose. In reality he was in considerable personal danger throughout the period. Beyond that, his friend and biographer, Gerhard Nebel, claims that, through his friendship with the German military commanders in Paris, Jünger was instrumental in saving the lives of thousands of Frenchmen.

Yours faithfully,
IVO JAROSY
Academy Cinema
London W1

Local Hero

SIR,—Nick Roddick, in *SIGHT AND SOUND* Spring 1983, watches *Local Hero*; he watches 'the whole mixture...topple back into the clutches of a certain kind of British Cinema'; he sees the possibility of 'a triumphant tying together of all the themes' allowed to slip. As I read, I see Nick Roddick topple back into a certain kind of British Criticism; that kind that must have its pound of thematic flesh, that demands 'commitments', that stumps home unsatisfied if it feels it's been served up a 'richly textured film', but has missed out on the stuffing.

One of the many reasons why *Local Hero* is such an exciting film is its refusal—thematic, if you like—to be serious, to settle

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LETTERS

for points of view, to be, coherently, this or that. It is, in fact, profoundly and magnificently frivolous, and out of that visual and narrative frivolity comes a poetry, informed by laughter, that may well, in a decade or two, take on some of the stature of other, earlier films in this very European tradition. Renoir and Buñuel rather than Ealing. Even then, of course, one is aware of the disservice done by rattling around exclusively in cinema: this is really a film after Lawrence Sterne's heart . . .

Yours faithfully,
A. C. JEFFORD
London SE24

Yol again

SIR,—Ms Forbes' response to my letter (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1983) mystifies more than it illuminates. The *description* I gave of the Mehmet and Ermine episode in *Yol* is not an *interpretation*. She says, 'They are denounced, hauled before the travel police and publicly humiliated', and this is not what happens in the film, *as a matter of fact*. My point had little to do with 'interesting reading'.

Yol could have done much to divest Ms Forbes of received views about an alien culture had she simply looked at the screen and listened to the soundtrack

more closely than she did. Her misdescription of the Mehmet and Ermine episode, to take just one example, goes a long way towards justifying this assertion.

I strongly object to her associating me with intellectual and political positions nowhere asserted or implied in my letter. I did not say or suggest that 'everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds in Turkey.' Nor do I believe that Yilmaz Güney should be in exile. My letter consists of juxtaposing her misdescriptions against accurate descriptions followed by commentary on the psychology of the characters, a commentary made possible by an 'insider's knowledge' of the Middle East. I think it necessary to separate what the characters do from what they believe they are doing and what we might think about both.

Where Ms Forbes' article and her response to my letter go wrong, I feel, is that one finds it difficult to decide whether she is writing about the subject at hand or herself. On one level, of course, this sort of ambiguity may be seen as a grand philosophical paradox, but on another level, one much more immediate, it is nothing more than a source of unnecessary confusion.

Yours faithfully,
AHMED MANSOON
Penzance

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COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for
The Outsiders, *Zelig*.
RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for
Breathless.
20th CENTURY-FOX for *The Leopard*.
UIP for *Exposed*, *White Dog*.
ARTIFICIAL EYE for *L'Argent*,
Danton, *Fantôme de la Liberté*,
La Voie Lactée, photograph of
Andrzej Wajda.
CONTEMPORARY FILMS for *Judex*.
CINEGATE for *Another Time*,
Another Place.
VIRGIN FILMS for *The Ploughman's Lunch*, photograph of Richard Eyre and Ian McEwan.
ATLANTIC RELEASING CORPORATION for *Valley Girl*.
INTERNATIONAL CINEMA CORPORATION for *The Plouffe Family*.
PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *Baby, It's You*.
PBS for *Middletown*.
GOLDCREST for *The Dresser*.
UMBRELLA FILMS/CATHERINE ASHMORE for *Loose Connections*.
FILMEL for *Thérèse Desqueyroux*,
Thomas l'Imposteur.
FR3 MARSEILLE for *Le Dernier Mélodrame*.
ARTISTES ASSOCIEES/VIKING PRESS for *Baisers Volés*.
SOVINFILM/POSEIDON FILMS for *Anna Pavlova*.
SIANEL PEDWAR CYMRU for *Superted*, *Joni Jones*.

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ON NOW

● COME BACK TO THE 5 & DIME JIMMY DEAN, JIMMY DEAN (Alpha)

Popeye, in 1980, marked the end of Robert Altman's independent Lion's Gate enterprise, a move to the East Coast, a new production company (Sandcastle 5), and a new career in the theatre. *5 & Dime* is the first film version of



his stage shows to emerge theatrically, although the third to be shot, all for cable tv. Astonishingly, although it makes no bones about being a filmed play, *5 & Dime* embraces the best of Altman's cinema. The cast is all female, apart from some off-stage presences and one character who is briefly and mistakenly male; the dramatic occasion is a reunion, a twentieth anniversary for the Disciples of James Dean fan club in Texas; and the theatrical event a predictable demolition of some flimsy facades. But out of this stage business, Altman produces some uncanny modulations of imagery and character. Like his camera, his five and dime ladies are in perpetual motion, passing between two time zones (by virtue of a mirrored set, one side for 1975, one for 1955), and dissolving into and out of each other as though through forms of dream life. The ensemble is the thing, but marvellous performances, particularly from Sandy Dennis and Sudie Bond. (Cher, Karen Black, Kathy Bates, Marta Heflin.)

● MERRY CHRISTMAS MR LAWRENCE (Palace)

Prisoner of war camps have always been ideal places—in fiction, at least—for dealing with cultural differences. In Nagisa Oshima's film, this forcing ground has been taken several stages further into hallucination by virtue of international co-production and casting. *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* is based on a trio of stories by Laurens van der Post (distilling his own experiences as a prisoner of the Japanese), scripted by Oshima, then Englishified by Paul Mayersberg, and finally cast with two pop stars (David Bowie,

Ryuichi Sakamoto) who are not so much actors as strangely presiding spirits. Bowie is an English officer drawn into a strange duel-cum-love affair with his captor; Tom Conti stands by to explain one side to the other and to be effectively excluded by both. The English half of the equation becomes no less ritualised than the Japanese—a secret ceremony in which the two sides discover their deepest affinity in what they have lost and betrayed. A haunting tale, seeming most a riddle when it should be most familiar.

● QUERELLE (Palace)

Fassbinder's last film is an extraordinary reading of Genet; a film 'about' rather than 'of' the novel. Set in a completely stylised vision of the port of Brest, it explores through its eponymous sailor—the focal point of everyone's needs—the dangers (murder and betrayal) attendant on desire turning to love. The dream-like stylisation is, unlike *One From the Heart*, wholly appropriate, since the characters are conceived purely as images—reflecting each other, attracting the gaze of others, shifting and concealing identity. Which gives certain figures on the sidelines—Franco Nero's ship's captain, Jeanne Moreau's bar-room singer—a crucial role: doomed to watch until *Querelle's* sense of self is shattered, or (in the case of Moreau's solitary woman) to recognise their lack of any place in the pattern. The golden-hued passion and eroticism (sadly muted in this German-language print) is wonderfully matched by the bleakness of the vision. (Brad Davis, Dieter Schidor.)

● TRADING PLACES (UIP)

Director John Landis, who has a proven talent for low comedy (*Animal House*) and offbeat parody (*An American Werewolf in London*), here tops his earlier money-spinning achievements with a really sparkling old-style



Hollywood comedy. Two wealthy curmudgeons (Ralph Bellamy and Don Ameche, sensing the real McCoy, find the years drop from them) have a wager on circumstances and human nature: an ascendant stockbroker (Dan Aykroyd, at his prissy, dandified best) is tricked into poverty; a conman (Eddie Murphy, the jiving foil) is offered the stockbroker's job. Having uncovered the deception, they join forces—backed by Denholm Elliott, the butler, and Jamie Lee Curtis, the kind-hearted hooker (character roles done to perfection)—and turn the tables on the tricksters. The jokes are

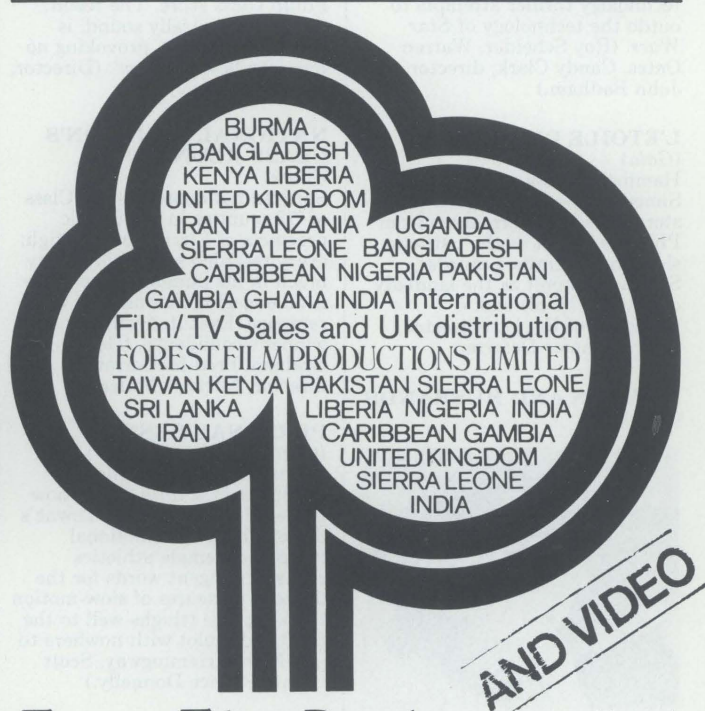
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SPACE FRAME NARRATIVE: SILENT CINEMA 1916-26

A conference to be held at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, 15-18 December 1983. It continues the work of two previous conferences on Silent Cinema, held at Dartington in 1980 and at Derby in 1982. It deals with both Hollywood and European Cinema, with a particular focus on the work of Lubitsch and Sjöström.

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placed, the laughs anticipated; the pace skips; but the old-fashioned populist nub of the matter is the characters' all-American determination, their point-blank refusal to be put down. Robert Paynter, of *An American Werewolf*, is the director of photography; Timothy Harris and Herschel Weingrod (the latter from the London International Film School) the writers.

BETRAYAL

(Virgin)

An intelligent, 'civilised', well-acted and ultimately pointless adaptation of Pinter's icy comedy-drama about the multiple manifestations of upper-middle-class marital infidelity. A film whose district code is NW 1. (Jeremy Irons, Ben Kingsley, Patricia Hodge; director, David Jones.)

THE BLACK STALLION RETURNS

(UIP)

The original, directed by Carroll Ballard, was forceful and intense; the remake, featuring an implausible theft and a great deal of desert, strives long, hard and ineffectually for the expansive lyrical beauty of its predecessor. (Kelly Reno, Teri Garr; director, Robert Dalva.)

BLUE THUNDER

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Dirty Harry-style cop takes to the air to defeat sinister technocrats out to stir up racial conflict in order to test their new weaponry. Political and moral coordinates are then fairly scrambled as this perils-of-technology thriller attempts to outdo the technology of *Star Wars*. (Roy Scheider, Warren Oates, Candy Clark; director, John Badham.)

L'ETOILE DU NORD

(Gala)

Hamfisted adaptation of Simenon's novel, but good (if stereotyped) performances from Philippe Noiret as the pathetic slob who commits a murder, Simone Signoret as the landlady captivated by his exotic memories of Egypt. (Director, Pierre Granier-Deferre.)

FRIENDS AND HUSBANDS

(Miracle)



Margarethe von Trotta's study of the developing relationship between an academic (Hanna Schygulla) and a neurotic, withdrawn artist (Angela Winkler) is hopelessly saturated in middle-class values and art-movie clichés. Amidst the sensitivity and stripped pine, its feminist motivation seems merely facile.

IN THE WHITE CITY

(Contemporary)

Alain Tanner's new film exists in a magic limbo, just like its ship mechanic hero, who wanders round Lisbon exploring his identity with the help of a super-8mm camera and mouth organ,



constant correspondence with his wife back in Germany, and a see-saw affair conducted in a bar whose clock runs backwards. Tanner's camera eye is eloquently cool and precise; the fantasy never congeals into the whimsical lumps that finally clogged *Light Years Away*. (Bruno Ganz, Teresa Madruga, Julia Vonderlinn.)

KOYAANISQATSI

(Blue Dolphin)

This 'film poem' showing a world 'off-balance' does without verbal commentary, instead supplementing its stream of treated images with an insistent Philip Glass score. The result, though ecologically sound, is arrogant bombast, provoking no response beyond 'wow'. (Director, Godfrey Reggio.)

NATIONAL LAMPOON'S CLASS REUNION

(Rank)

Spirited buffoonery as the Class of '72 reunites in the Gothic precincts of Lizzie Borden High: every retarded schoolkid is very much in his humour—and there is an engaging madman on the rampage. Executed with a winner's confidence. (Gerrit Graham, Fred McCarren; director, Michael Miller.)

PERSONAL BEST

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

No personal best for the scriptwriter of *Chinatown*, now turned director. Robert Towne's drama about the emotional hazards of female athletics eschews pungent words for the dubious pleasures of slow-motion track footage (thighs well to the fore) and a plot with nowhere to go. (Mariel Hemingway, Scott Glenn, Patrice Donnelly.)

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

(UIP)

This should have been, as it was on Broadway, 'The Pirates of Pizzazz'. But director Wilford Leach's crippling disregard for the differences between theatrical and cinematic conventions has yielded a hideous travesty not only of the G & S original but of Joseph Papp's jazzed-up revival.

(Kevin Kline, Angela Lansbury, Linda Ronstadt.)

PSYCHO II

(UIP)

Norman Bates is home with mother after 22 years in the loony bin. Surprisingly successful attempt to recapture the Hitchcock look, although the mood (perhaps inevitably) is cruder in its shocks and more prankish in its humour. (Anthony Perkins, Vera Miles, Meg Tilly; director, Richard Franklin.)

RETURN ENGAGEMENT

(Mainline)

Curious documentary on the unholy alliance which united drug guru Timothy Leary and Watergate villain Gordon Liddy in a nationwide lecture tour. Fascinating but not entirely convincing attempt to explore the pair as opposite/complementary extremes summing up the 60s. (Director, Alan Rudolph.)

RETURN OF THE JEDI

(Fox)

The fine line between a movie to which one can take the children and an outright children's movie has been definitively crossed by the third of the *Star Wars* cycle, a tedious teddy bears' picnic of muppets, moppets, puppets and poppets. Only the effects are special. (Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher; director, Richard Marquand.)



RUNNERS

(Cinegate)

The Wednesday Play in Wonderland, or a disconcertingly dissonant city symphony on ghost-town London. In this surreal family romance, the sociology of escapee kids is left in the shadows while Stephen Poliakoff concentrates on the odyssey of an obsessively escapist father (James Fox as an unlikely Nottinghamshire Ethan Edwards). (Jane Asher.)

SISTERS OR THE BALANCE OF HAPPINESS

(Blue Dolphin)

The British title of Margarethe von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* would equally suit this 1979 predecessor. The lives of two more German sisters—one a super-efficient secretary, the other a self-destructive student—are entwined with a schematic flourish, mostly camouflaged by adroit acting (from Jutta Lampe particularly) and von Trotta's talent for crystallising social and psychological states. (Gudrun Gabriel, Jessica Früh.)

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

(UK Film Distributors)

Intermittently striking version of Ray Bradbury's novel about the sinister carnival that batters on a small American town and its

dreams. The script, alas, unkindly highlights the cracker-barrel philosophy. (Jason Robards, Jonathan Pryce; director, Jack Clayton.)

THE STAR CHAMBER

(Fox)

Constantly prevented from administering justice in the courtroom because of legal loopholes, a group of judges turn vigilante. It's Michael Winner territory with a veneer of conscience, but the snail's pace and clumsy structure make it difficult to care. (Michael Douglas, Hal Holbrook; director, Peter Hyams.)

SUPERMAN III

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Richard Lester's second *Superman* stint still finds him employed according to his reputation rather than his talents. He dutifully has a go at the Man of Steel with slapstick, farce and a comic-strip Manicheism, but seems to be working as laboriously against the grain as he was in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. (Christopher Reeve, Richard Pryor, Annette O'Toole.)

THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON

(Cannon)

Reunion twenty years after for a basketball team reliving its moment of glory. Proddings of conscience, drink and macho coach lead with embarrassing predictability to a sorry deluge of home truths. (Robert Mitchum, Bruce Dern, Stacy Keach; director, Jason Miller.)

TWILIGHT ZONE—THE MOVIE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Despite introductory promises of a journey to another dimension, this collection of four revamped tales from Rod Serling's old tv series is patently a back-issue. Two wheezily improving moral tales (from John Landis and Steven Spielberg) and two whimsical horrors (from Joe Dante and George Miller) show both their age and signs of feature-length stretching. (Dan Aykroyd, Vic Morrow, Scatman Crothers, Kathleen Quinlan.)

WARGAMES

(UIP)

For once, a commercial success is deserved. John Badham's film about a boy computer wizard who plugs into a system designed to simulate World War Three ingeniously blends various current obsessions (Spielbergian child heroes, nuclear panic, rampaging technology). A few balls are dropped in the juggling between comedy and drama, but the liveliness is disarming. (Matthew Broderick, Dabney Coleman, John Wood.)



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BEST ACTOR: Giovanni Mauriello

NB: The closing date for applications for the year 1984/85 will be 31st January, 1984
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